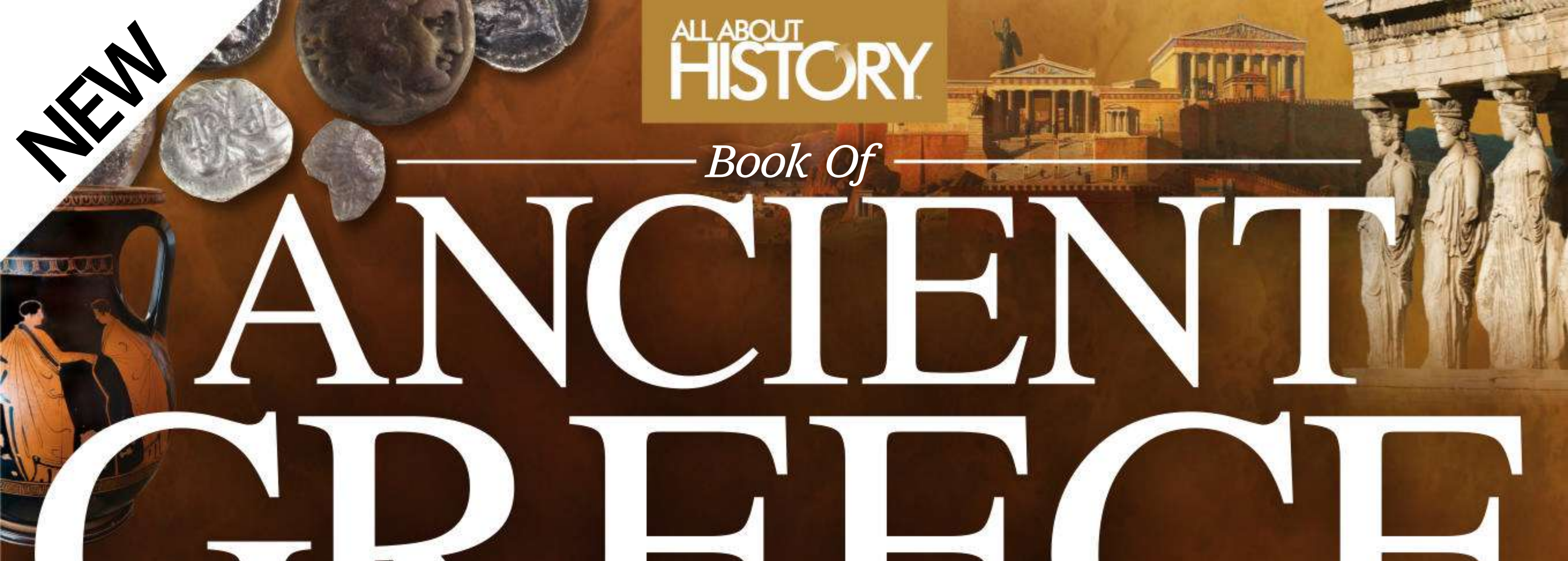
NEW

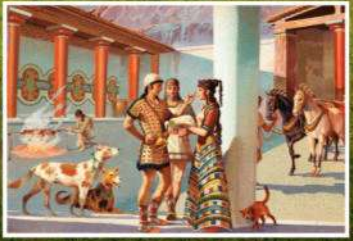
ALL ABOUT HISTORY



Book Of
ANCIENT GREECE

Art & Culture ◆ War & Empire ◆ Mythology & Religion ◆ Life & Society

Discover the greatest minds of Ancient Greece



Digital Edition

FUTURE

NINTH EDITION

Explore one of history's most influential civilisations

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Book Of

ANCIENT GREECE

The influence of Ancient Greece on the world around us and the history of Western civilisation as a whole cannot be underestimated. The Greeks were responsible for inventing, evolving or advancing everything from politics, architecture and the arts, to philosophy, science and mathematics. In this book we explore many of their ideas, concepts and discoveries and reveal some of the greatest Ancient Greek minds that ever lived. We uncover fascinating tales of mythology and the importance of the gods, while we also take an in-depth look at warfare and conflict in Ancient Greece and how key battles helped shape its history. We hope you enjoy the journey.

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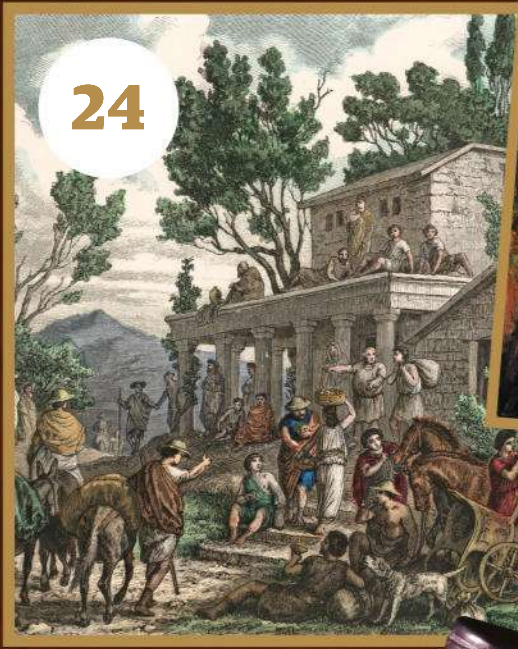

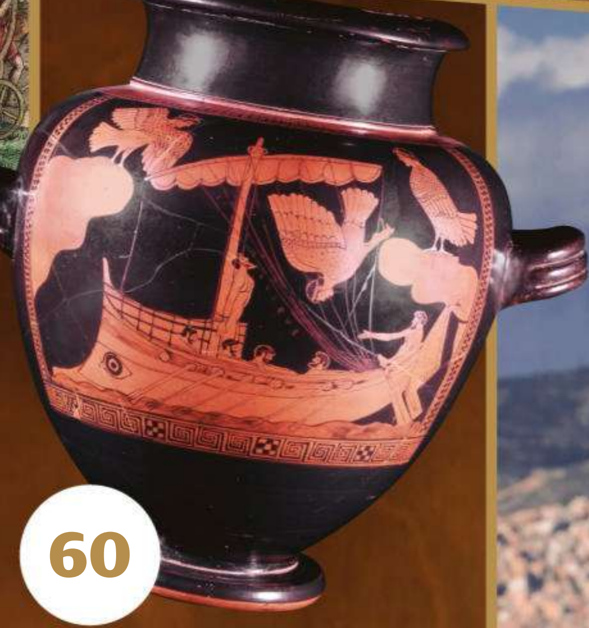

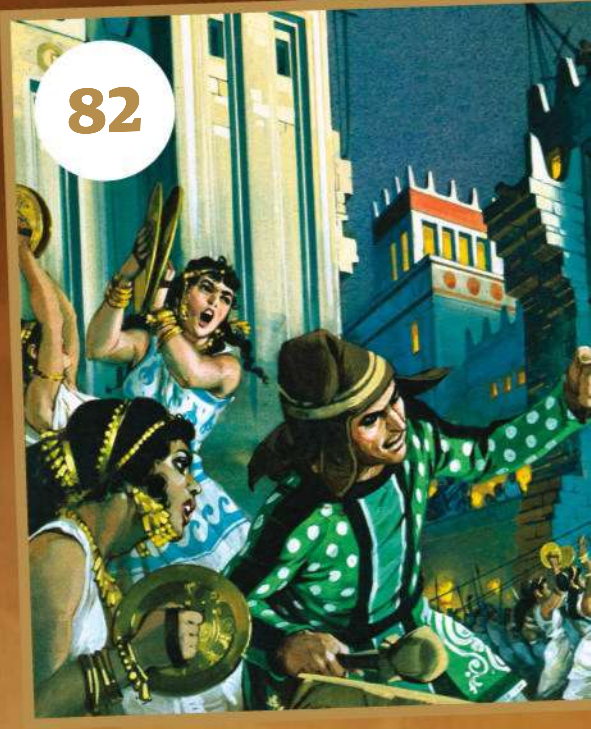

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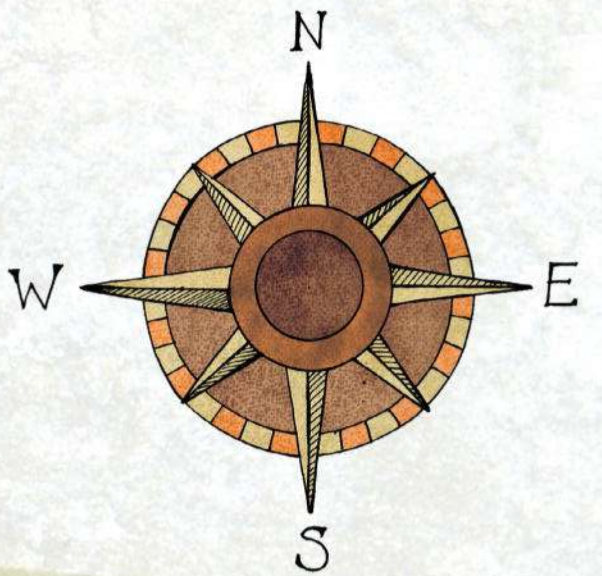
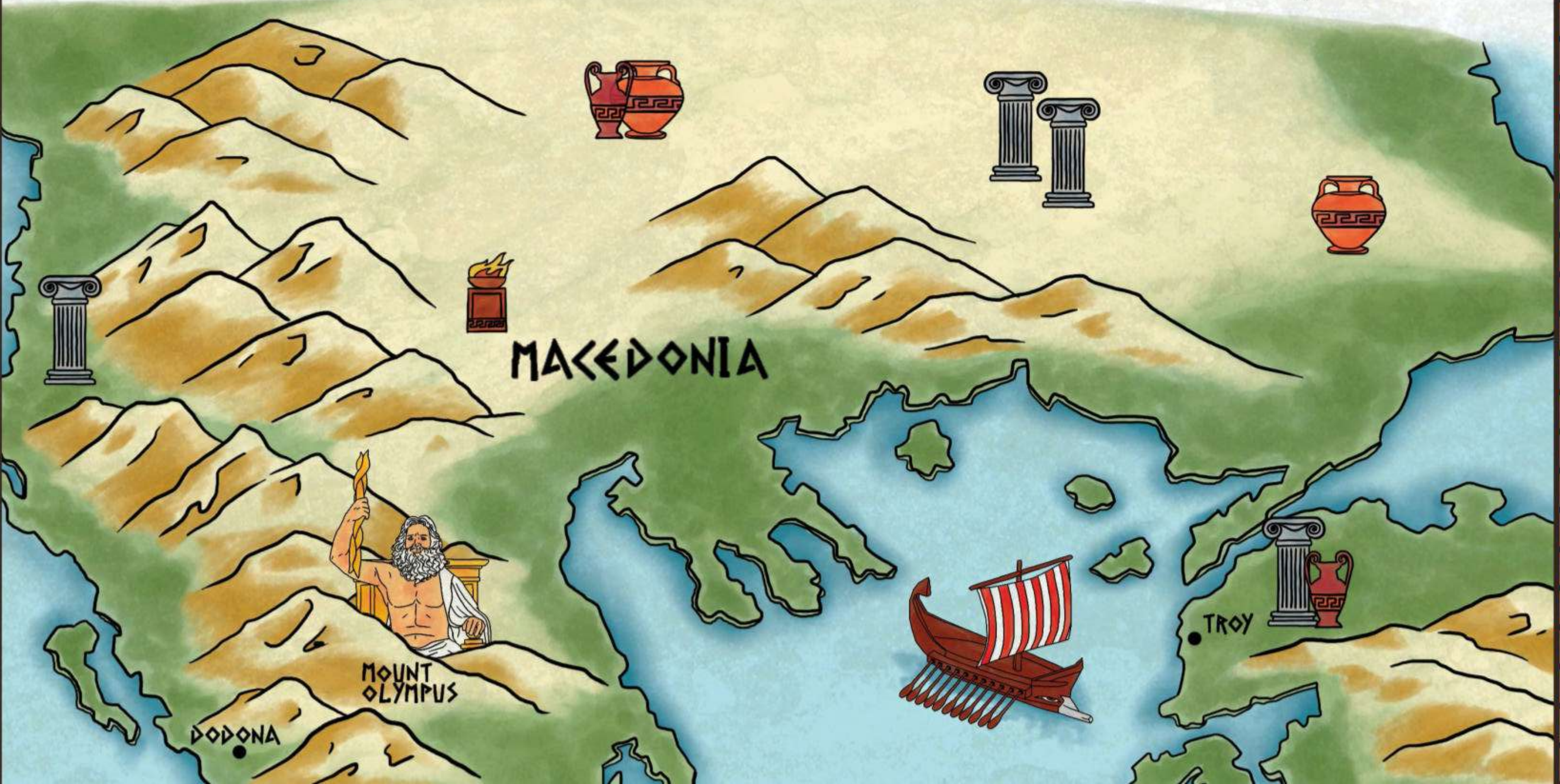
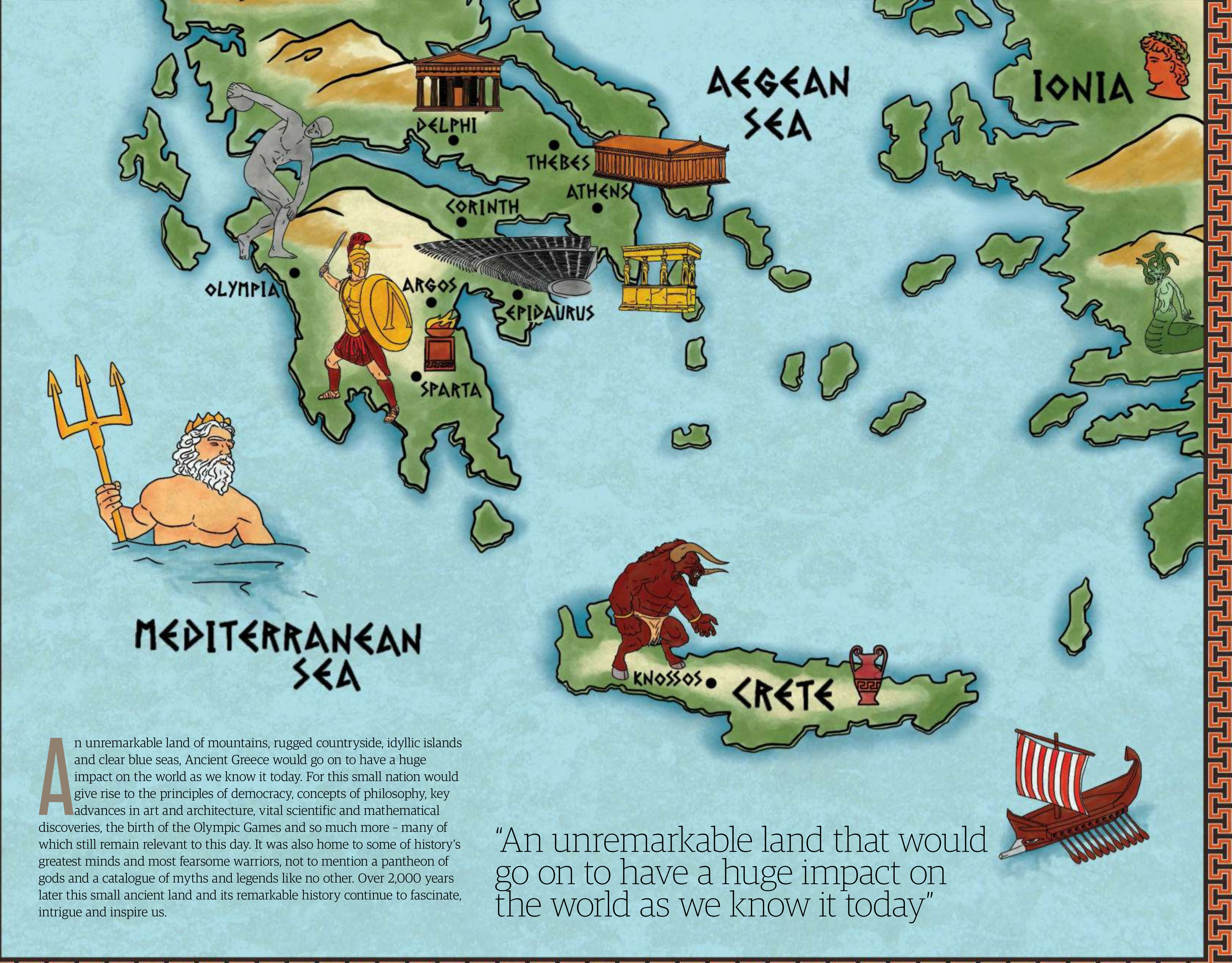
Map of Ancient Greece

A small land that gave the world so much, Ancient Greece continues to influence and inspire over 2,000 years on

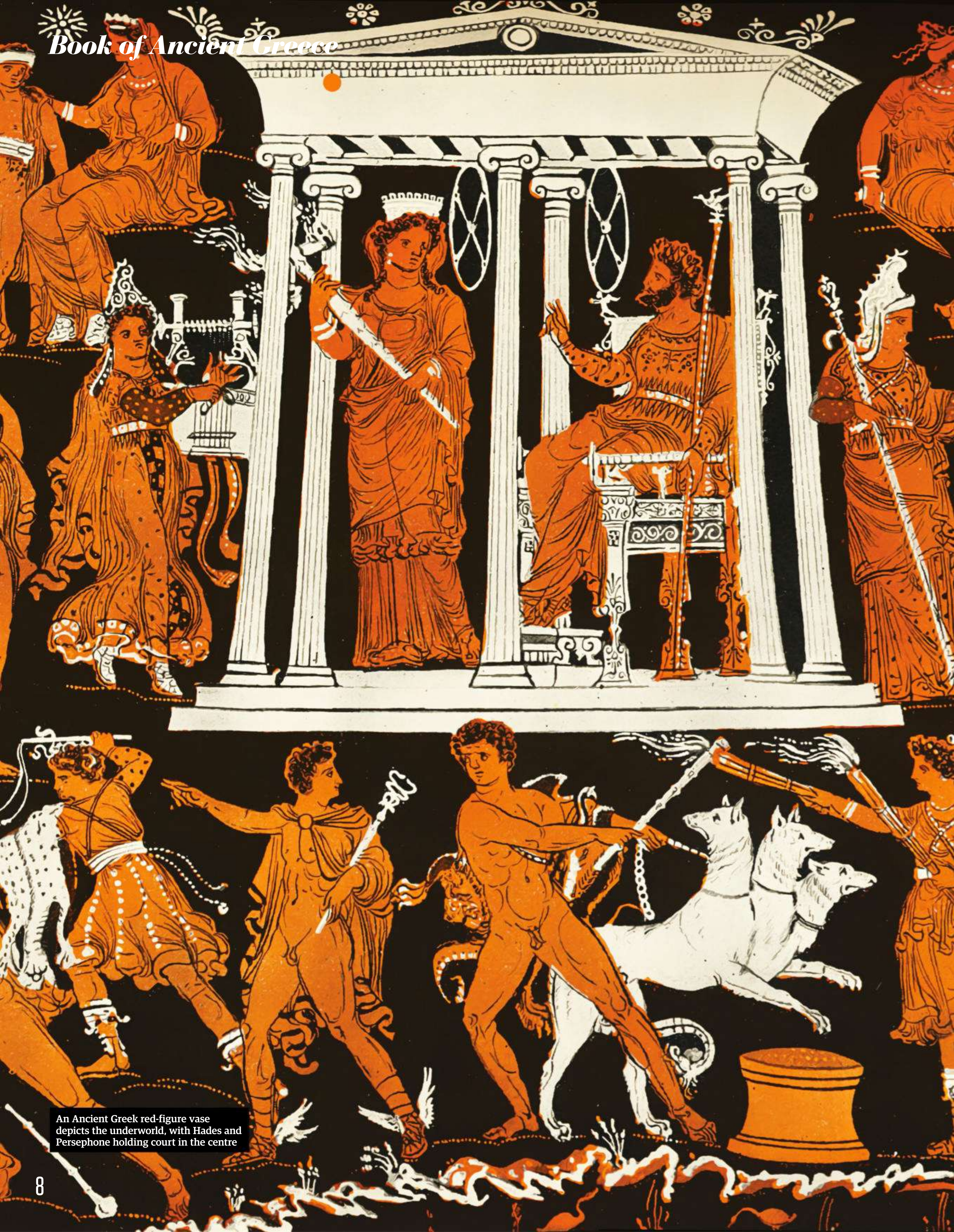



MACEDONIA
TROY
MOUNT OLYMPUS
DODONA

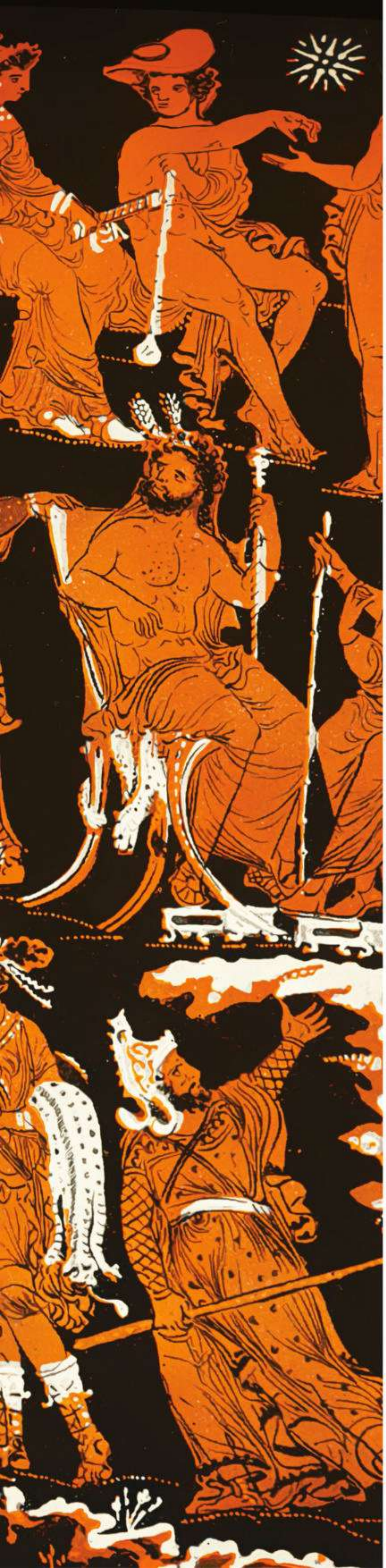

AEGEAN SEA
IONIA
DELPHI
THEBES
ATHENS
CORINTH
OLYMPIA
ARGOS
EPIDAURUS
SPARTA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
KNOSSOS
CRETE

An unremarkable land of mountains, rugged countryside, idyllic islands and clear blue seas, Ancient Greece would go on to have a huge impact on the world as we know it today. For this small nation would give rise to the principles of democracy, concepts of philosophy, key advances in art and architecture, vital scientific and mathematical discoveries, the birth of the Olympic Games and so much more – many of which still remain relevant to this day. It was also home to some of history's greatest minds and most fearsome warriors, not to mention a pantheon of gods and a catalogue of myths and legends like no other. Over 2,000 years later this small ancient land and its remarkable history continue to fascinate, intrigue and inspire us.

> "An unremarkable land that would go on to have a huge impact on the world as we know it today"



An Ancient Greek red-figure vase depicts the underworld, with Hades and Persephone holding court in the centre



The beginnings of Ancient Greece

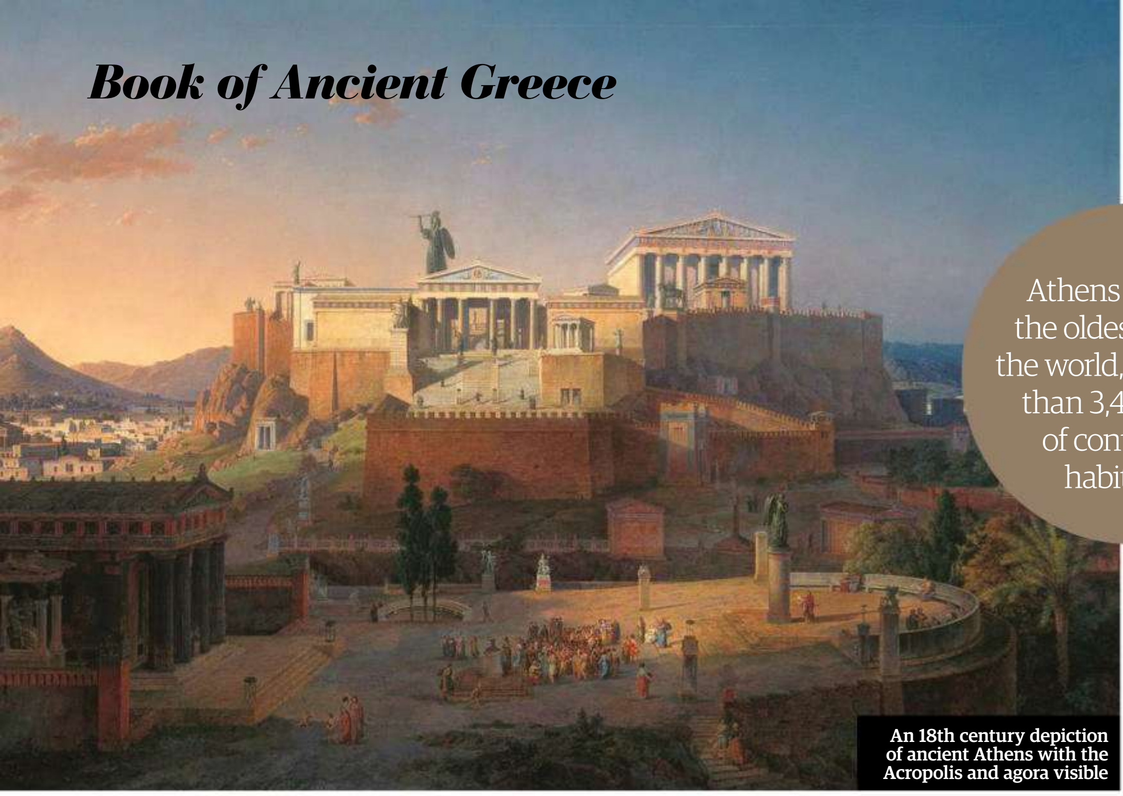
From the dark beginnings of human civilisation, Greece has been a fascinating country on the forefront of human development in the West

Ancient Greece, with its myriad of different cultures and peoples, has long been seen as the cradle of Western civilisation. Having reached the heights of almost all aspects of human learning, Greece was at the heart of the ancient world, and formed the basis for much of Western society's science, politics, philosophy and drama, as well as the Olympic Games, the Latin alphabet and historiography.

When exploring Ancient Greece, it is worth noting that the Ancient Greeks, as well as modern-day Greeks, do not refer to their country as such, rather calling it Hellas. The name comes from the mythical progenitor of the Greek race, a man named Hellen. It is not known when Hellen is supposed to have been born, or even if he existed, and he shouldn't be confused with Helen of Troy. The mixing of myth and legend, especially in the early years, was not uncommon in the Greek world. Today we have a great many explanations for all manner of natural phenomena, and our understanding of science and medicine is far more advanced than those who inhabited the ancient world. For them, the divine was a way to explain the unknown, and so early Greek history is directly linked to their religious and mythical beliefs.

The geography of Greece can certainly be seen as an inspiration for these beliefs, with tall, majestic mountains making up 80 per cent of the landmass, but it is also home to rugged coastlines and rolling fertile plains. While offering unrivalled views, this mountainous country made overland travel rather difficult, so the Ancient Greeks would more often than not turn to the sea for fast transportation and trade. While connected by the sea, local communities would often find themselves isolated by local topography, leading to the formation of independent city-states and communities throughout the land. These settlements would be built up around a central citadel, which – being situated on high ground – would offer a better vantage point to spot incoming raiders or invaders. These would eventually become known as acropolises, with the most famous example being located in Athens.

Archaeological finds point to human settlement in Greece dating back to the Neolithic era. The early settlers and ancestors of the Greek people migrated through Russia and down into the northern part of the country in around 4000 BCE. From this journey, the population spread across the land to found part of the Aegean civilisation, who were fishermen and traders based out of the islands of the Aegean Sea. They flourished from 3200 to 1100 BCE, and provide evidence for continued human habitation of the area. Around the same time, 2700



An 18th century depiction of ancient Athens with the Acropolis and agora visible

Athens is one of the oldest cities in the world, with more than 3,400 years of continuous habitation

to 1500 BCE, the Minoan civilisation came to be active on the island of Crete. Experts believe that the island was flooded after a natural disaster, and this has often pointed to the beginnings of the Atlantis myth. Later, the Mycenaean civilisation, which borrowed much from the Minoans, began to take shape. The Mycenaeans were the first people to begin speaking Greek, and their civilisation ruled from 1650 to 1200 BCE. The later Greeks would hold the Mycenaeans in high regard, awed by the massive stone citadels they constructed. So vast were the stones that they were named 'Cyclopean walls', after the one-eyed mythical monster, as it was thought only giants could have moved such weight. The mixing of the Minoan and Mycenaean gods and goddesses would provide the Ancient Greeks with a foundation on which they constructed their own pantheon of gods. The creation myth of the Olympian gods' war and victory over the Titans began in this period.

After the fall of the Mycenaeans came a period known as the Greek Dark Ages. This period gained the name because from around 1100 to 800 BCE we have very little in the way of historical documents to tell us what happened. It was during this time that the fabled Trojan War was chronicled by Homer. While the city has been discovered, the exact details of the actual war remain fuzzy, and are so interwoven with mythology that the two have become almost impossible to untangle.

From 800 BCE onwards is when we begin to find more familiar names that we associate with Ancient Greece, with the first being the oracle at Delphi. Serving as a prominent feature in Greek society for more than a thousand years, the oracle would give divine guidance to the rulers of the various city-states on matters of war and politics.

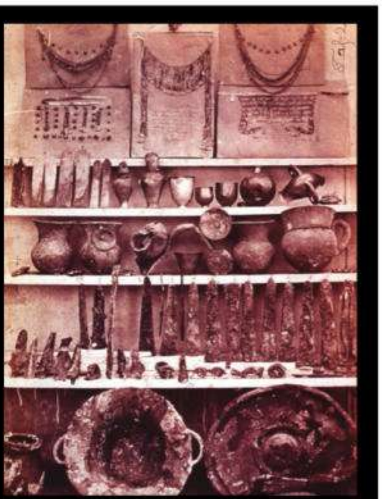
Only a few years later, in 776 BCE, the first Olympic Games was held. Although a far cry from the modern games, and despite only having one event, the games started a competitive tradition that would last until the 4th century when it was outlawed by the Romans. This is known as the Archaic period of Greek history, and saw a massive expansion in the population of the country and the beginnings of

Trojan War myth

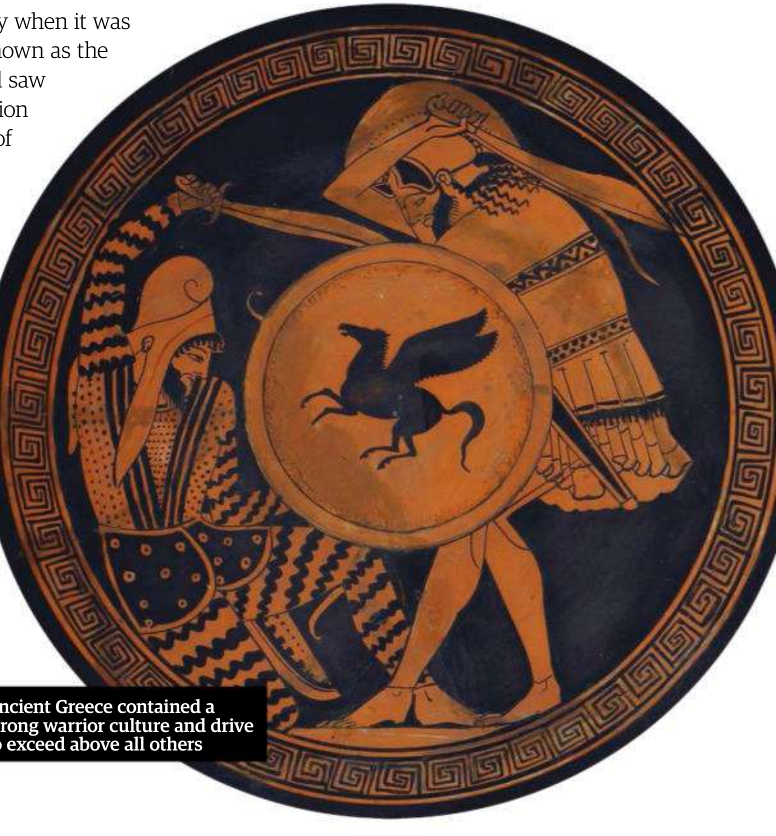
A war fought between the Achaeans and the Trojans, the Trojan War is one of the most influential and well-known pieces of Greek mythology that exists. Featured in many works of literature, most famously in Homer's *The Iliad*, a tale of war, love and betrayal.

The Ancient Greeks believed the war had historical merit, but understood that Homer's account was filled with exaggeration and myth to improve the story. Modern historians and archaeologists have tried to find links in sources of other cultures, like the Egyptians or Hittites, and the consensus seems to be that the conflict took place, but the details – like the cause and outcome – are unfortunately lost to time.

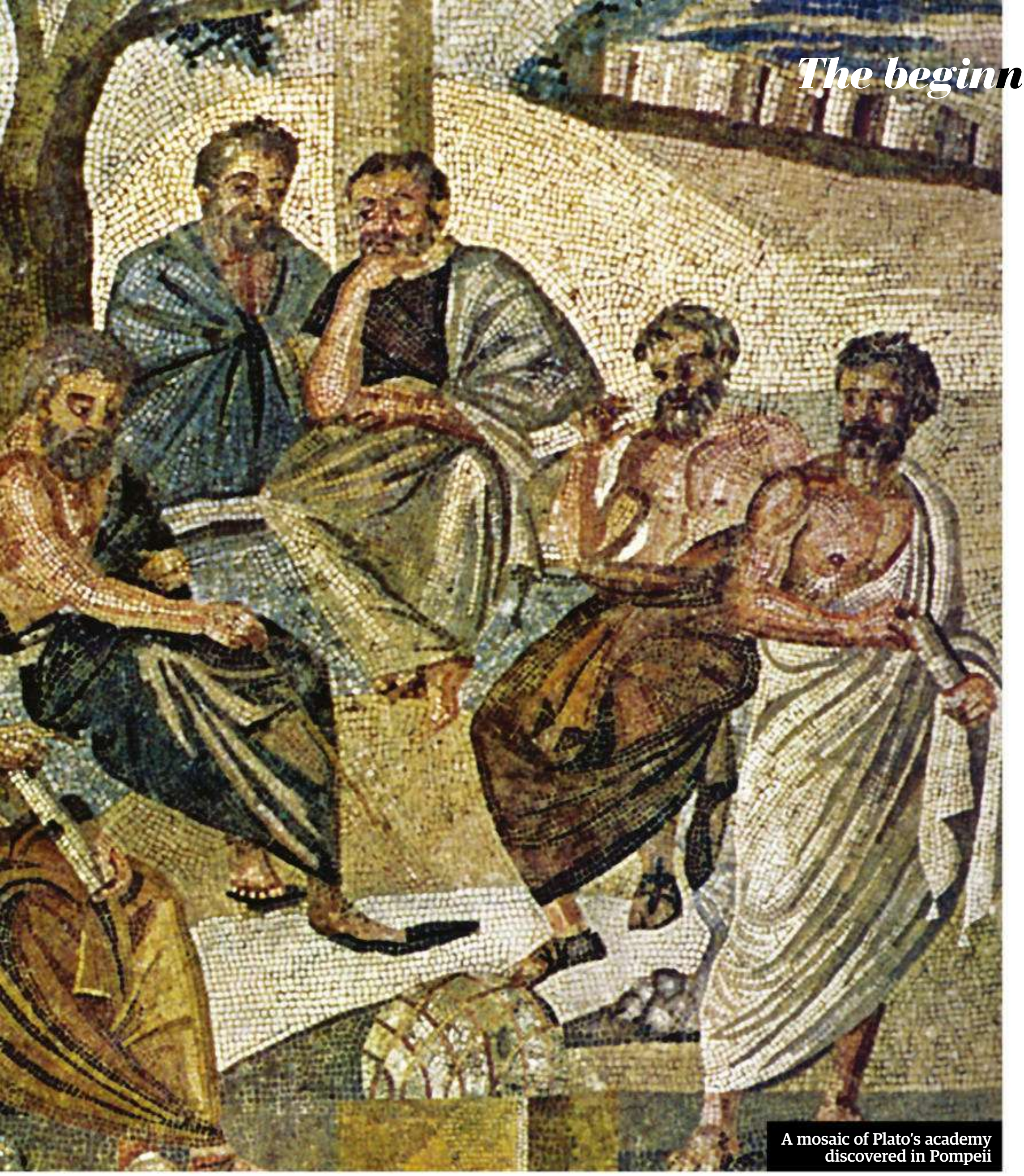
The city of Troy was founded on the western tip of Anatolia in the 19th century, and while it is almost certainly the Homeric Troy, no one can say for certain.



A group of artefacts, known as Priam's Treasure, was found at the supposed site of Homeric Troy



Ancient Greece contained a strong warrior culture and drive to exceed above all others



A mosaic of Plato's academy discovered in Pompeii

The remains of the Roman Agora in Athens

The Greek cityscape

While all Greek city-states were unique, common urban architecture would help bind them together. The cityscape of a Greek city would have been fairly similar throughout the country. In the centre of the town on a raised mound would stand the acropolis, or citadel. The most famous of these is located in Athens, where the Parthenon is, but they can also be found in cities like Corinth and Argos. Religious temples would dominate their skyline where pleas to the gods would be made; usually with sacrifices to ensure those pleas were heard.

At the foot of the acropolis would be the agora, the beating heart of the city. The political buildings would be found here, and so would serve as a meeting place for the city's great and good. As the agora would be full of life, each Greek city would contain a dedicated cemetery so that the dead could always be laid to rest peacefully. For entertainment, citizens would usually have to travel to the surrounding hills, as the superior acoustics often made them prime spots for open-air theatres.

some of its most famous events. This was also an age of colonisation for the Greeks, with settlements cropping up in all the islands of the Aegean Sea and the coastline of Asia Minor, in modern-day Turkey.

Colonies further afield were also founded, driven by the need for food, which could not come from Greece due to its lack of arable land. These included the southern tip of Italy and Sicily, the coastline around the Black Sea, and a few locations on the Iberian and African coast. This was also the time when Greek cities would make the shift from monarchies into republics. Known as poleis, these republics would control the surrounding land. The two great city-states, Athens and Sparta, began their rise to power during this period. Sparta is famous for its intense militaristic society, boasting to have created the toughest soldiers the world has ever seen. In contrast, Athens is seen as the birthplace of democracy and a slew of influential philosophers.

Next came the Classical period, a golden age of sorts, where grand ideas like Greek democracy really came to the fore, and famous buildings such as the Acropolis and the Parthenon in Athens were built. It was roughly situated between the Persian invasions and the rise and fall of Alexander the Great, and the period plays host to many great names, such as the philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. It was also a time of warfare, with the titanic Greco-Persian Wars seeing Greece invaded by one of the largest armies ever recorded, and the Peloponnesian War, which saw the Athenian and Spartan empires vie for supremacy over all of Greece.

It wasn't until the 4th century BCE that King Philip of Macedonia began to bind them into one cohesive unit. What Philip started would be completed by his son, Alexander - known as Alexander the Great - who crushed all resistance in his path. In Alexander's short life span he would carve out a vast empire that would encompass Greece, modern day Iraq and Iran, the Levant, Egypt, and reach as far as India. Although the empire collapsed shortly after his death, it did herald the Hellenistic period, in which Greek culture was spread far and wide throughout the known world.

> Poor farmland would see Greece mostly cultivate olives, grapes and grains (mostly wheat and barley), which is known as the 'Mediterranean triad'

The fall of Alexander's empire, and its subsequent carving up by his generals, laid the foundation for the rise of Rome. Around a hundred years after Alexander's death, in the 2nd century BCE, the country of Greece would fall to the military might of the Roman Republic. While Rome was a foreign invader, much of Roman culture, such as their pantheon of gods, was borrowed from the Greeks, and the Greeks still largely influenced the Romans during this time. This was the fall of mainland Greece, but a small pocket of Hellenistic culture, the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt, was not overthrown until 30 CE after the naval Battle of Actium. So named after the Macedonian General Ptolemy, the dynasty would fall with Queen Cleopatra, who would take her own life with her lover, Mark Antony.

Despite the overthrow of an independent Greece, Hellenistic culture still spread throughout the Mediterranean Basin, and paved the way for the evolution of Western civilisation as we know it now.

8000 BCE - 479 BCE

Early Greek civilisation

8000-1300 BCE

Early archaeological evidence points to human habitation stretching back to the Neolithic period. Through this and the Bronze Age, the Aegean civilisation comes into being. This is a blanket term for the different groups living on mainland Greece, the Aegean Islands and Crete. With few historical records for them, we rely on archaeological and geographical findings to gain an understanding of them. We know that trade and commerce played a large role in their survival. With farmland being at a premium in Greece, the ability to trade allows these civilisations to sustain themselves.

An 18th century map of the Aegean Sea and surrounding islands

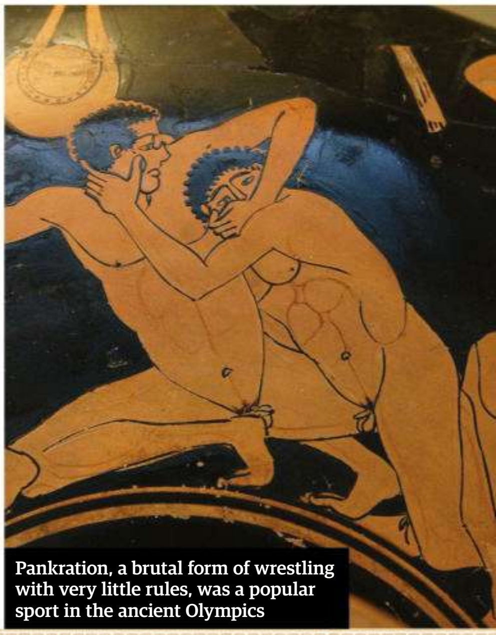
Philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras instructed his followers not to eat beans, possibly because they contained the souls of the dead

First Olympic Games

776 BCE

Originating as a festival to honour Zeus, the chief of the gods, the Olympic Games grow into a national pastime that champions the competitive spirit of the Greek people. The first games only have one event, which is a sprint near the sacrificial altar, but soon grow to include many different sports, such as wrestling and chariot racing.

Competitors and spectators flock to the sanctuary at Mount Olympus every four years to watch this spectacle, and it would endure almost a thousand years until it was outlawed by the Emperor Theodosius – who banned all pagan worship.


Pankration, a brutal form of wrestling with very little rules, was a popular sport in the ancient Olympics

Destruction of the Minoans

Although theories are disputed, the eruption of Thera, one of the largest volcanic events in recorded history, brings an end to the Minoan civilisation, with a massive tsunami – caused by the eruption – decimating the isle of Crete.

c.1600 BCE

The Trojan War

Recorded in Homer's *The Iliad*, the Trojan War is a mix of myth and reality. The Greeks gain victory through deception, infiltrating the city of Troy and brutally sacking it.

1250 BCE

The Greeks visit Italy

Always on the lookout for new territory and arable farmland, Greek settlers hop over the Mediterranean and found colonies on the southern tip of Italy and also in Sicily.

750 BCE

8000-1300 BCE | 1600 BCE | 1400 BCE | 1300 BCE | 1250 BCE | 1100 BCE | 776 BCE | 750 BCE | 730 BCE | 727 BCE

The Sea Peoples appear

Thought to have been made up of a confederacy of tribes from craggy coastlines around the Aegean Sea, the Sea Peoples are savage coastal raiders who cut a bloody swath through the Mediterranean.

1300 BCE

End of Mycenaean civilisation

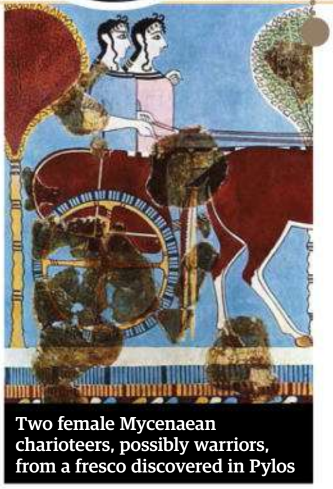
Experiencing two massive civil upheavals, the specifics of which are still being debated, the Mycenaean civilisation falls. Theories include a massive seaborne invasion or internal strife that devour the Mycenaeans from the inside.

c.1100 BCE

Greek tragedy

Hippomenes, an Athenian magistrate, displays great cruelty when he punishes his daughter's infidelity by yoking the man to his chariot until he drops dead of exhaustion. He then locks his daughter up with a horse until she too dies.

727 BCE

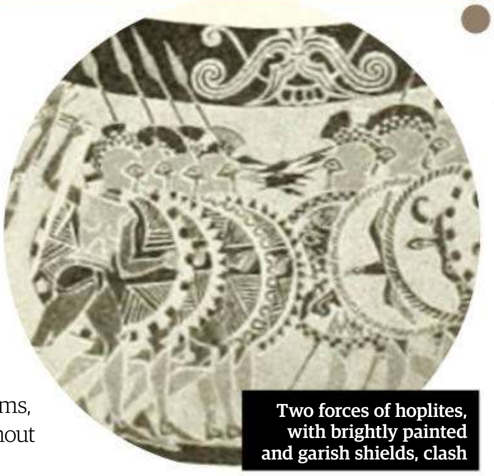

Two female Mycenaean charioteers, possibly warriors, from a fresco discovered in Pylos

The Mycenaean civilisation flourishes

1400 BCE

The Mycenaean civilisation is a precursor to Greek civilisation. From their citadels, the elite of the Mycenaean society flourishes.

They also have contact with the Minoans of Crete, and the Mycenaeans are influenced by the island culture, especially in the creation of art. The Greeks are in awe of the Mycenaeans. Coupled with advanced drainage and irrigation systems, the Mycenaeans conduct trade throughout the Mediterranean world.


Two forces of hoplites, with brightly painted and garish shields, clash

The Messenian Wars

c.730 BCE

The first in a series of conflicts between Sparta and Messenia, which sees Spartan victory and the rise of its power. Both sides are provoked when a trade deal turns bloody, and soon a full-scale war is raging. The Spartans win within a year, and gain substantial wealth.

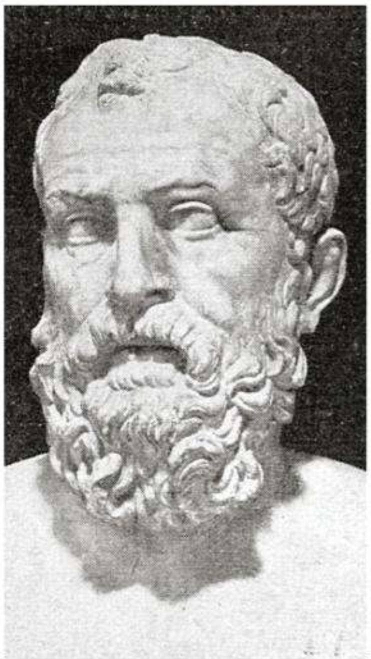
Messenia is forcibly depopulated, with its inhabitants either willingly migrating or being enslaved by the Spartans. These slaves later try to rebel against their masters, but are swiftly dealt with.

Democracy in Athens

594 BCE

It is the Athenian statesman Solon who champions the beginnings of democracy in Athens, and by extension the Western world. Such is his influence that he achieves an almost-mythical status in later years, and is regarded as a founding father of Athens.

During his lifetime, Athens undergoes an economic crisis where much of the arable farmland is held by a small group of aristocrats. Solon sets about restructuring the social system that assigns people to wealth brackets based on income. He also oversees the creation of new law codes, making the system fairer for the majority. Solon successfully lays the foundations of a political system that has since been adopted all over the world.

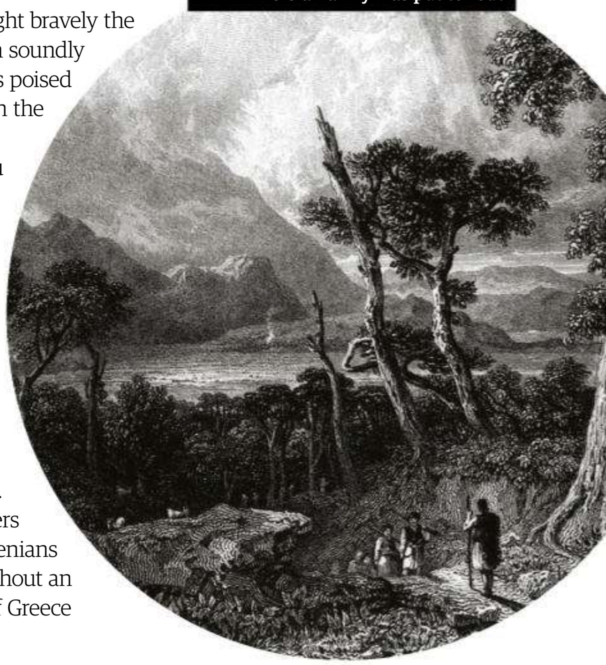

A stone bust of Solon from the National Museum in Naples

Battle of Plataea

479 BCE

While the Greeks had fought bravely the year before, they had been soundly defeated, and Xerxes looks poised to sweep over resistance in the summer of 479 BCE.

On the northern plateau of Plataea, the two armies draw up, neither wanting to cross a river in the middle of the battlefield and break up their formations. The Persians mistake a Greek retreat for a route and charge across the river. They are soundly defeated by the savage Sparta hoplites. Many of the Persian soldiers are slaughtered when Athenians attack their camp, and without an army, Persia's ambitions of Greece are lost.


The plain of Plataea, in the shadow of Mount Cithaeron, where the Persian army was put to rout

Athens goes potty for pottery
Red-figure pottery becomes the new artistic trend in Athens. It is recognisable by its red figures painted on a black background, and replaces the older black-figure pottery that originated in Corinth.
525 BCE

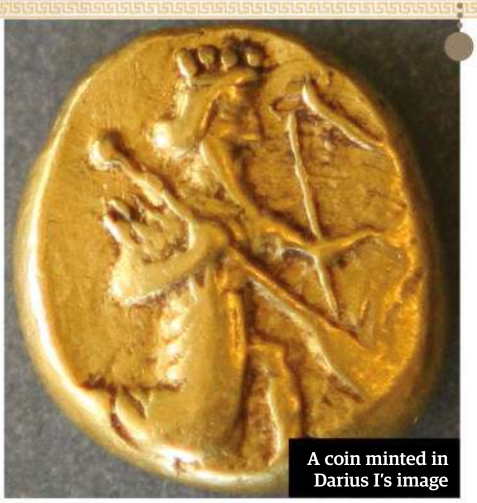
Battle of Marathon
The culmination of King Darius's first invasion of Greece, this battle sees a smaller Greek army smashing the might of the Persian invasion force. So damaging to Persian invasion plans, they are forced out of Greece for ten years.
490 BCE

Battle of Thermopylae
One of the most famous battles in history, Thermopylae sees 300 Spartans and 7,000 other Greeks hold a pass against overwhelming odds. The battle occurs at the same time as the naval engagement at Artemisium.
480 BCE

594 BCE | 580 BCE | 525 BCE | 499 BCE | 497-479 BCE | 490 BCE | 480 BCE | 479 BCE

Vying for power
The Greek colonies in Sicily come into conflict with the Carthaginian Empire. Carthage would become famous as the city-state that took on the might of Rome, but like Greece, was unsuccessful.
580 BCE

The Persian Wars
To punish Athens and Eretria's role in the Ionian revolt, Persian king Darius launches an invasion of Greece. This invasion also serves to remove any more destabilising Greek influences that might threaten the Persians.
497-479 BCE

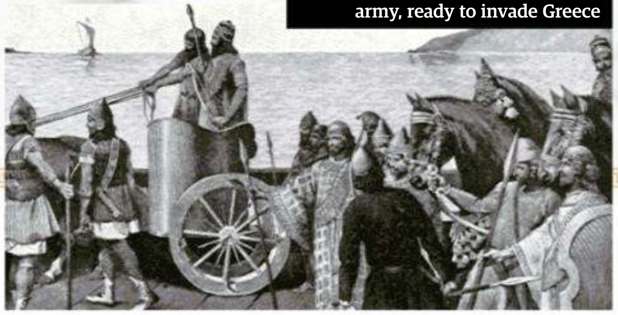

A coin minted in Darius I's image

Ionian revolt

499 BCE

The precursor to the Greco-Persian wars, the Ionian revolts see the Greek colonies of Asia Minor revolt against their Persian overlords. Unpopular local tyrants and bundled military operations set the scene, with mainland Greece sending supplies and men to aid their countrymen.

The Ionians are the first to go on the offensive by burning Sardis, an important city in the Persian Empire. Then the Persian military machine proves to be too strong; after five years of defensive fighting, the Ionians are beaten into submission and come under the rule of the Persian kings.


Xerxes, ruler of the Persian Empire, crosses the Hellespont with his army, ready to invade Greece

The Persians strike back

480 BCE

After the defeat at Marathon, the Persians regroup under King Xerxes, who launches another invasion of Greece. In an attempt to head off the invaders, the Greeks muster a fleet of more than 200 ships in the straits of Artemisium. The massive Persian fleet, over 1,200 strong, loses roughly a third of its strength to stormy weather and the Greek coastline, but uses its numbers to force the Greeks back. It allows the Greeks to gain valuable insight into Persian tactics, and shatter the aura of invincibility of the Persian war machine.

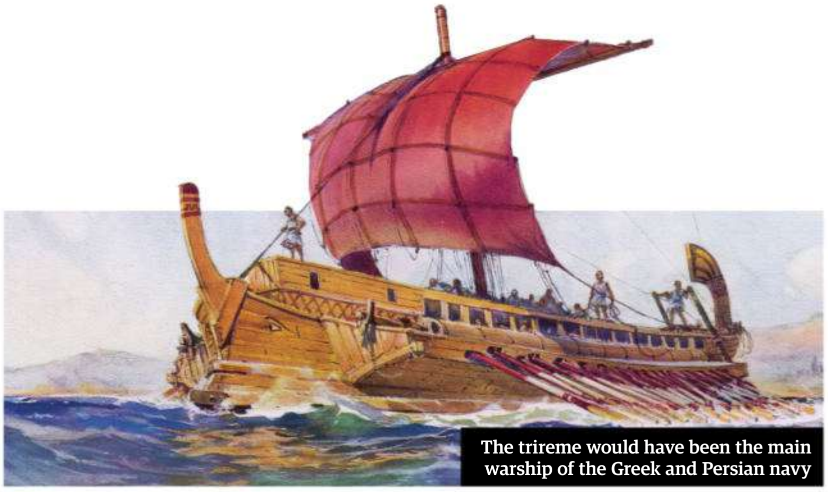
479 BCE - 1896

Victory or defeat

479 BCE

After the Greek victories against the Persians, it is clear that mainland Greece is safe from future invasion. Off the back of this, Athens forms the Delian League, an alliance of hundreds of city-states that will collaborate and continue to fight the Persian Empire. While a noble cause, from a Greek perspective, the Athenians soon begin to use the navy that the league had formed for its own uses. The league essentially becomes the Athenian Empire, as Athens now has the naval might to bully any wayward city-states into line. This soon brings it into conflict with its rival, Sparta.

Stone fragment of an Athenian decree detailing the collection of tribute from league members



The trireme would have been the main warship of the Greek and Persian navy

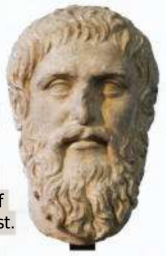
The King's Peace 387 BCE

As the Peloponnesian War saw resentment against Athens as one of its main causes, so the Corinthian War was fuelled by anger against Sparta. The conflict saw Sparta gain an early upper hand on land but decisively get beaten at sea by a Persian fleet. Subsequent territorial gains by Athens saw the Persians ally with Sparta, which brought the remaining Greek allies to the negotiating table.

The Peace of Antalcidas, or the King's Peace, sees Persia take control of all cities in Asia Minor and places like Cyprus in the Aegean. This ensures that the Persian sphere of influence can once again interfere in Greek affairs, and the peace accord – almost ironically – does not bring peace to mainland Greece, where intermittent conflicts rage for years after.

Helot Revolt
A devastating earthquake near Sparta is utilised by the Helots, the Spartan slave class, to rebel against their cruel masters. The superior Spartan warriors soon make short work of the rebels.
465 BCE

Birth of Plato
Along with his teacher, Socrates, and his pupil, Aristotle, Plato lays out the foundation of Western philosophy and science. The polymath also goes on to found the Platonic Academy in Athens, the first centre of higher learning in the west.
c.427 BCE



Death of Thucydides
The author of the only full account of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides stands side by side with Herodotus for his influence on historical narrative. Like Herodotus, he is almost given a nickname, dubbed the 'father of scientific history'.
c.401 BCE

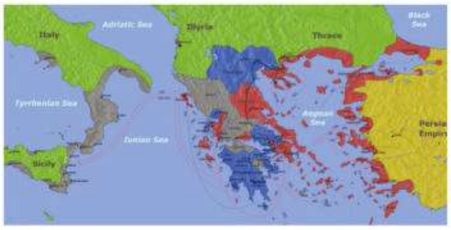
Finding the atom
The philosopher Democritus, known as the 'father of modern science', lays out his ideas of atomic theory. Although hugely influential, none of his writings and work survive with us to the modern day.
400 BCE

479 BCE | 465 BCE | 431 BCE | 430 BCE - 429 BCE | 427 BCE | 401 BCE | 400 BCE | 387 BCE | 338 BCE

Death stalks the streets
An epidemic ravages the city of Athens and leaves it devastated. Accounts of lawlessness, excess and a general breakdown of morals are recorded, as the population does not believe it will survive long.
430-429 BCE

Plague returns to Athens
Just three years after the first wave of epidemics, a second wave hits Athens again. There is a range of theories as to what could have caused the outbreak, ranging from typhus to typhoid, but the truth may never be known.
427 BCE

Rise of Macedonia
Philip of Macedon defeats the allied cities of Greece in the Battle of Chaeronea. The immediate aftermath is Macedon gaining hegemony over almost all of southern Greece.
338 BCE



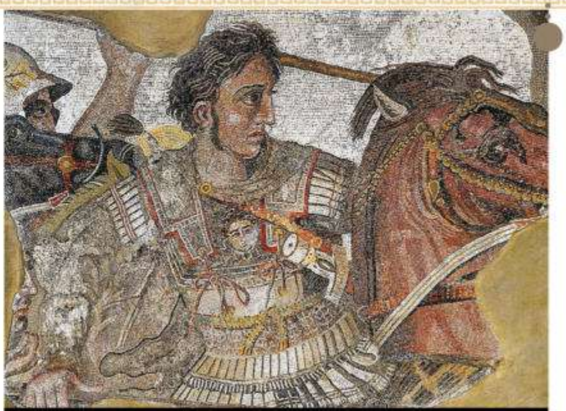
Start of Peloponnesian War

431 BCE

The growing power of Athens is of great concern to Sparta. The final straw is Athens' plan to rebuild its extensive harbour fortifications that Sparta fear will push undecided city-states over to the Athenian side.

The spark that ignites the conflict is over the city of Poteidaia, which falls under Sparta and its Peloponnesian League's sphere of influence. Promising protection from Athenian aggression, the situation escalates to open war.

After a long conflict, the Spartans smash the Athenian navy at Aegospotami – with financial help from their old enemy, Persia.



One of the most complete depictions of Alexander the Great from the *Alexander Mosaic*. He is described in historical sources as having blond hair rather than black

Conqueror of the known world

336-323 BCE

Having inherited a well-trained and professional army from his father, a young Alexander turns his insatiable hunger for conquest to the entire known world. Alexander has been fed stories of his divine status, and may believe himself to be a demigod. His charisma and energy gain him many loyal followers, and in a string of victories he conquers Greece, Egypt and the Persian Empire.

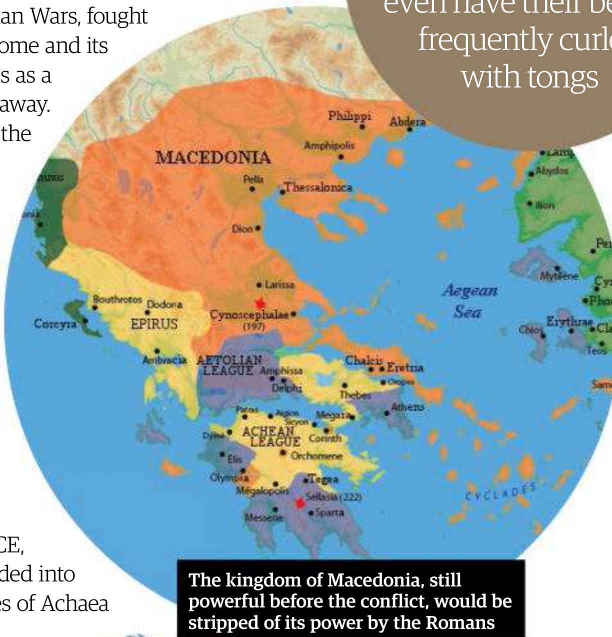
His army, having marched thousands of kilometres from home, revolts when it reaches India, and he is forced to turn back. After a heavy drinking session that leaves Alexander weak and fever ridden, one of the greatest generals in history passes away aged only 32.

Rome versus Macedonia

214 BCE

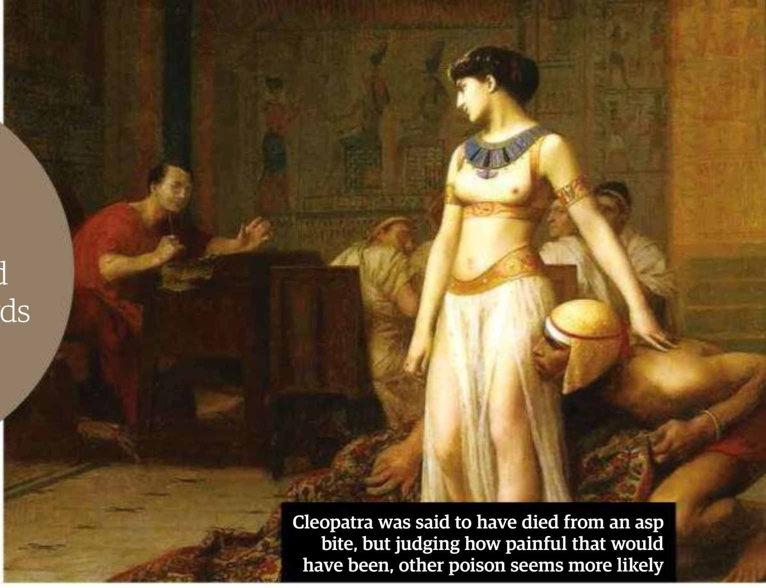
The first of the Macedonian Wars, fought between Macedon and Rome and its Greek allies, sees its status as a major power be stripped away. Macedon had sided with the Carthaginians during the Second Punic War, so it is a perceived danger to Rome. The threat of it sending reinforcements to General Hannibal Barca sees Rome dispatch troops to bring it to heel.

Over a prolonged conflict, the phalanx proves no match for the Roman legion, and by the second century BCE, Macedonia has been divided into the new Roman provinces of Achaea and Epirus.



The kingdom of Macedonia, still powerful before the conflict, would be stripped of its power by the Romans

> Beards were a badge or sign of virility in Ancient Greece. Men would even have their beards frequently curled with tongs



Cleopatra was said to have died from an asp bite, but judging how painful that would have been, other poison seems more likely

Death of a dynasty

30 BCE

When Alexander the Great dies, one of his generals, Ptolemy, installs himself as ruler of Egypt. From him springs the Ptolemaic dynasty that rules the Nile for close to 300 years. While mainland Greece is firmly under the thumb of Rome, Egypt – with its Greek ruling class – still has a measure of independence. This comes to an end with its last queen, Cleopatra, and her doomed love affairs with both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony – two of the most powerful men in the Roman Republic.

After instigating civil war against Augustus, Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide, ending the Greek line of pharaohs.

War of the Diadochi

Without Alexander's leadership to hold his empire together, the Diadochi – Alexander's generals – fight each other to inherit the kingdom. The first war splits the empire and signals years of conflict and bloodshed between former allies.

322-320 BCE

Gallic invasion

During the aftermath of the Wars of the Diadochi, the fragile peace is shattered as Gallic tribesmen invade through northern Greece. The Gauls loot the area surrounding Macedon, and gain substantial booty.

280 BCE

Defeat at Corinth

An allied Greek army is crushed under the heel of the Roman legions. With Corinth destroyed, the Roman Republic now has complete control over all of the Greek city-states.

146 BCE

336-323 BCE | 322-320 BCE | 281 BCE | 280 BCE | 214 BCE | 146 BCE | 86 BCE | 30 BCE | 381 CE | 1896

Foundation of the Achaean League

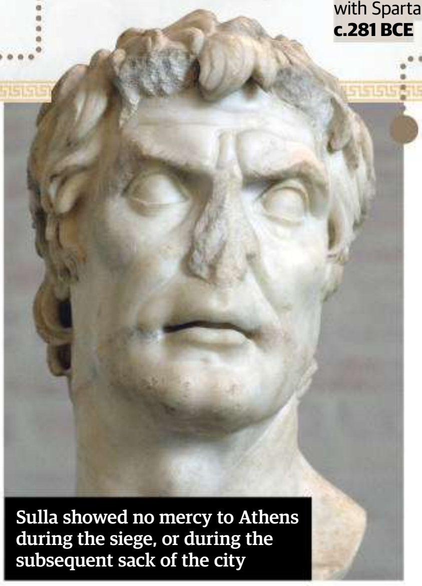
Also known as the Achaean Confederacy, this group of city-states from the northern and central territories of Greece considers themselves to have a common identity. This powerful group comes into conflict with Sparta, Macedon and later Rome itself.

c.281 BCE

The Oracle is silenced

Having survived numerous sackings, the Oracle at Delphi is closed when the Roman Emperor Theodosius I bans all pagan rituals, and instigates Christianity as the state religion of the empire.

381 CE



Sulla showed no mercy to Athens during the siege, or during the subsequent sack of the city

The sacking of Athens

86 BCE

During the First Mithridatic War, fought to stem the Romans' growing influence in the Greek world, a Roman army under the command of General Sulla lays siege to Athens. Stripping the surrounding countryside of wood and valuables, he starves the city. The sack of the city is said to have been so great that blood was flowing in the streets. The aftermath leaves no room for ambiguity; it is Rome, not Athens, that is the cultural and political heart of the Mediterranean.

Spyridon Louis was the first winner of the marathon event. Being Greek, this made him a national hero overnight

Modern Olympic Games

1896

A revival of the ancient games, but the emphasis changes from the need to win at all costs to one of sportsmanship. A new event is added that is conspicuously absent from the ancient games: the marathon. After the Battle of Marathon, a runner named Pheidippides races to bring news of the victory to Athens, a distance of over 46 kilometres. Athens also becomes the new seat of the games. Olympia, no longer needed for its religious significance, has been sidelined.

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LIFE & SOCIETY

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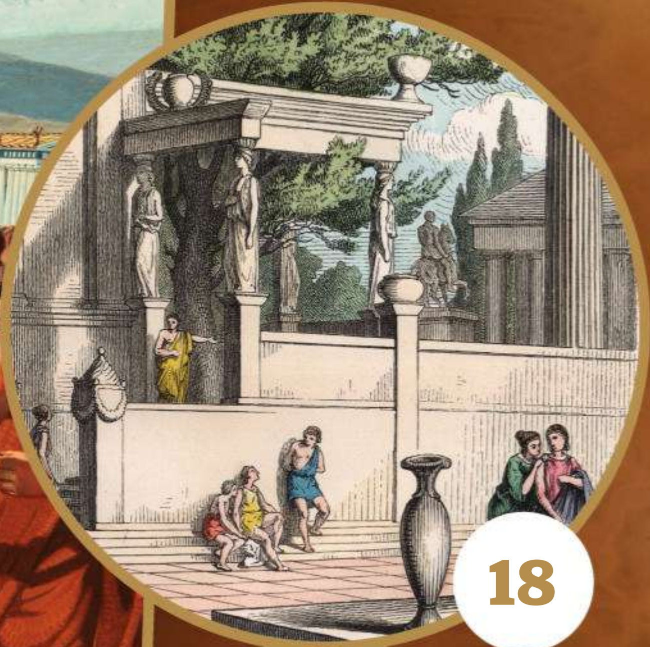
Discover the origins, evolution and influence of Athenian democracy

> "The Greek city-states were fiercely independent and quite diverse"

HOROSEIMI
ΤΕΣΑΓΟΡΑ



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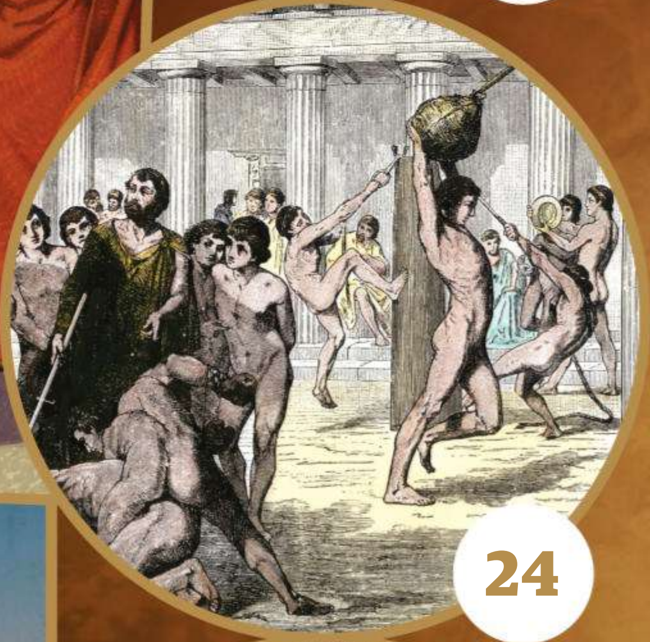

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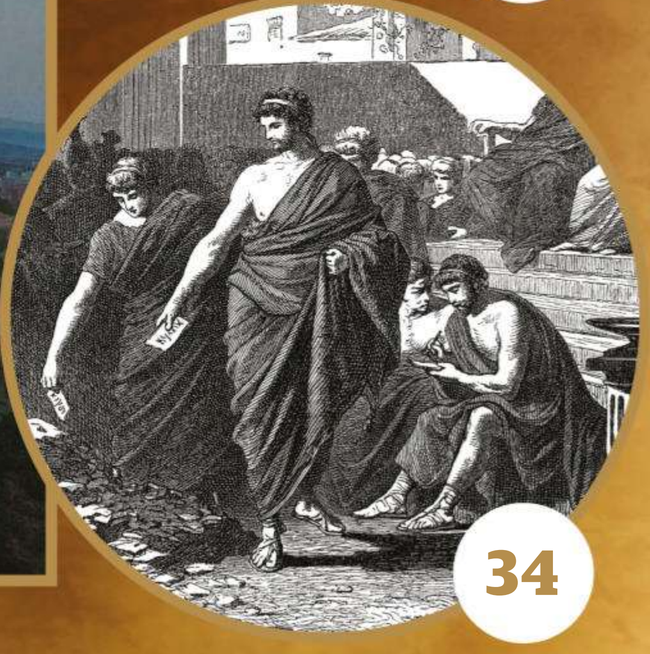

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The Greek city-states

Several contributing factors led to the rise of the city-state, or polis, in Ancient Greece, shaping the history of the Western world

The foundation of the glory that became Classical Greece was the city-state, or polis. Although the city-state is most commonly associated with Greek civilisation, it is not unique to that society. Babylonia, Phoenicia, and other cultures developed the concept of the city-state as well. In Ancient Greece, it was a phenomenon with origins in upheaval, migration, geography, and other factors.

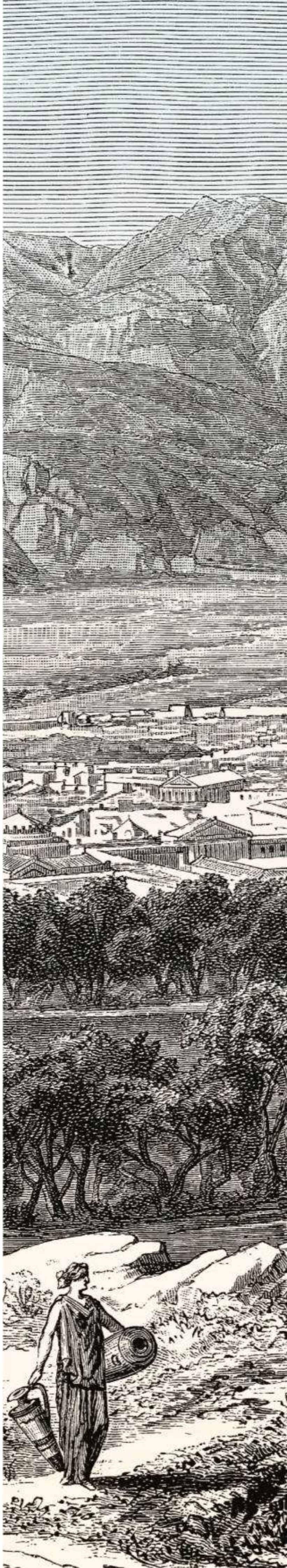
As the Bronze Age waned, Mycenaean Greece began its long descent to ultimate collapse. Named for the city of Mycenae, the Greece of the Trojan War endured for 500 years from 1600 to 1100 BCE. Athens and Sparta flourished at the height of Mycenaean power. However, the demise of Mycenaean civilisation is shrouded in mystery. Evidence suggests that there may have been internal strife. Some clues indicate that cities were put to the torch, destroyed and conquered by some outside power, possibly a Dorian invasion from the north. Written historical records of the period are scarce, perhaps perishing in the flames of the Mycenaean decline.

The fall of Mycenaean Greece precipitated a Dark Age. Archaeologists have found little evidence of civilisation during the period that persisted for roughly 300 years. No written record of the Dark Age has been discovered. Sometime during the 8th century BCE, however, it is believed that a substantial southward migration began. Greek peoples settled into agricultural communities. Cities were reoccupied and rebuilt. The Peloponnese and Attic peninsulas experienced population growth and established trade and commerce. Although the written form of the Mycenaean language had been lost, the Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet to their own speech, and finally a written record began to appear.

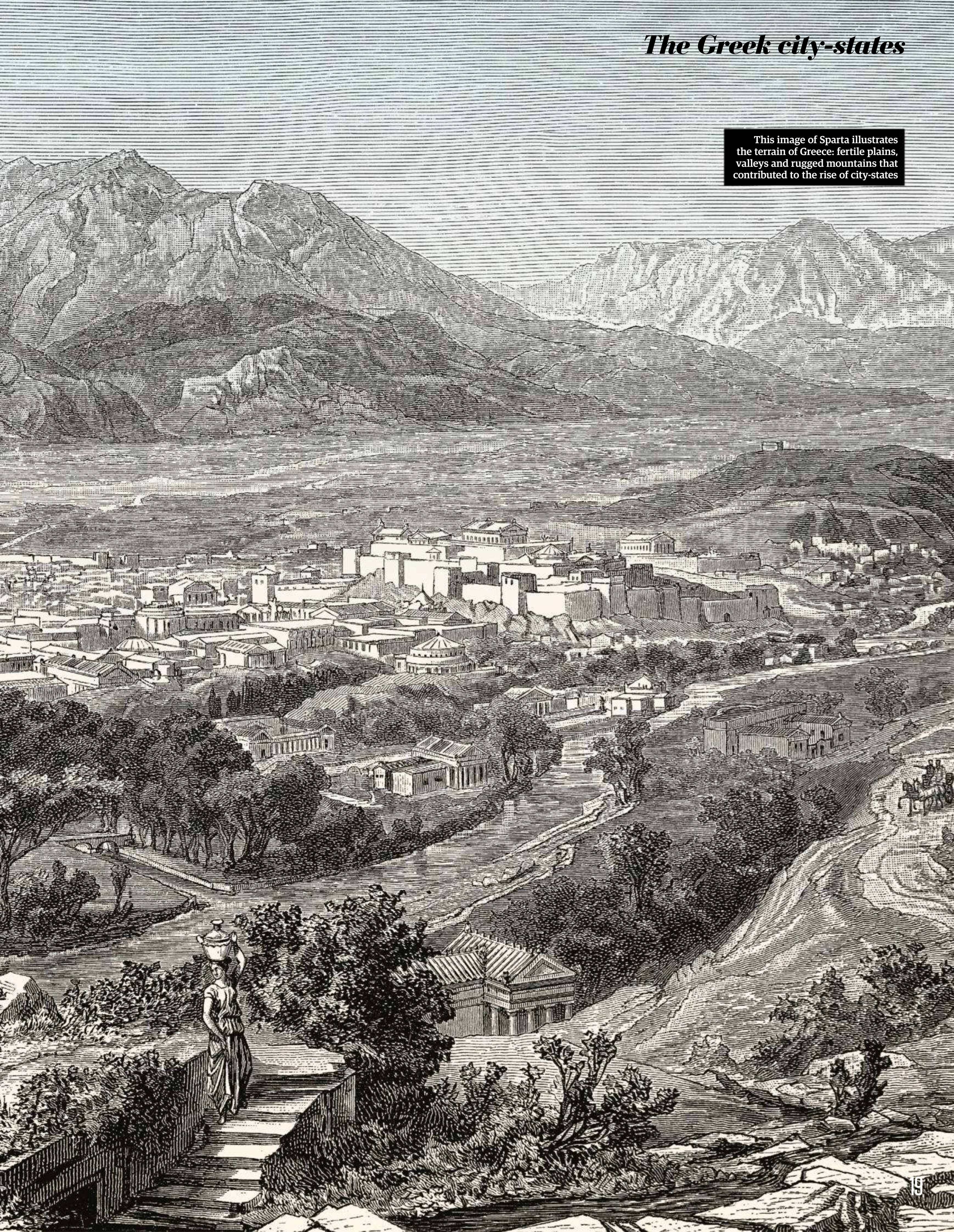
While the Greeks shared a common ancestry, physical barriers, chiefly the geography of the eastern Mediterranean basin, kept communities relatively isolated.

From roughly around 800 to 480 BCE, the Archaic Period of Greek history, the city-state itself emerged and flourished, and though cultural and political differences may have developed among the early settlements, historians will generally agree that the geography of the region was the principle contributing factor in the flowering of these economic and social centres. The geography of Greece consists of a rugged, mountainous interior punctuated by deep valleys and some areas with coastal plains that offer ready access to the Aegean, Ionian, and Mediterranean seas. Countless little islands cluster about the Attic and Peloponnese peninsulas.

Early city-states were agricultural settlements that took advantage of the fertile soil, and farmers cultivated the valleys and hillsides, initially on a subsistence basis but then thriving to the extent that they sought to trade their surplus crops for finished trade goods and other commodities. Those settlements in close proximity to the sea naturally developed maritime economies; fishing and



The Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was built at the city-state of Ephesus



This image of Sparta illustrates the terrain of Greece: fertile plains, valleys and rugged mountains that contributed to the rise of city-states merchant shipping stimulated trade and eventually colonisation began.

The mountains, valleys, plains, and seacoasts of Greece were formidable barriers to the concentration of large populations. Travel between the settlements was difficult at best. Therefore, separate communities began to evolve. While they may have shared common ancestry and language, these communities were largely isolated from one another, and the catalyst of economic growth and prosperity hastened their independent maturity. They fielded armies and sometimes built fortifications and walls for protection.

CITY BUILDING

These communities became known as poleis and developed their own senses of legal, social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics. As populations grew, the settlements expanded to include a fortified citadel, typically located on high ground and known as an acropolis, which would include one or more temples built in homage to a patron god and other deities. If the acropolis was not located in the centre of the city, it was usually nearby, built on a prominent hill or geographic feature. During the late 8th century, the agora, a public gathering space and marketplace, became a focus of daily life, including commerce and civil discourse. Gradually, as the city became the seat of government, urban population growth occurred and the influence of the polis expanded with the administration of surrounding territory, known as the chora, outside the city proper. The city-states developed distinct forms of government, wrote their own laws, and by the late 6th century BCE had issued their own coinage and begun collecting taxes.

At the height of the proliferation of city-states, more than 1,000 poleis had been founded in Greece and across the Mediterranean and the coast of Asia Minor. By the middle of the 7th century BCE, population growth and economic prosperity had spurred a great wave of colonisation throughout the region, and this tremendous expansion of Greek culture lasted for more than 250 years. Principal among the city-states were Athens, Sparta, Rhodes, Syracuse, Corinth, Thebes, Argos, Elis, and Eritrea. Sparta, which is said to have encompassed 8,500 kilometres, was by far the largest in terms of land. In contrast, Athens was the largest city-state in terms of population with roughly 200,000 inhabitants by the late 5th century BCE. The populations of other prominent city-states such as Argos and Corinth are believed to have peaked at 15,000 and 10,000 respectively. Sparta's population was estimated to be even fewer.

While the exportation of the Greek peoples and their culture contributed to the establishment of colonies, these settlements matured in their own right, maintaining trade and religious similarities with their parent cities but forming their own political identities and exercising autonomy.

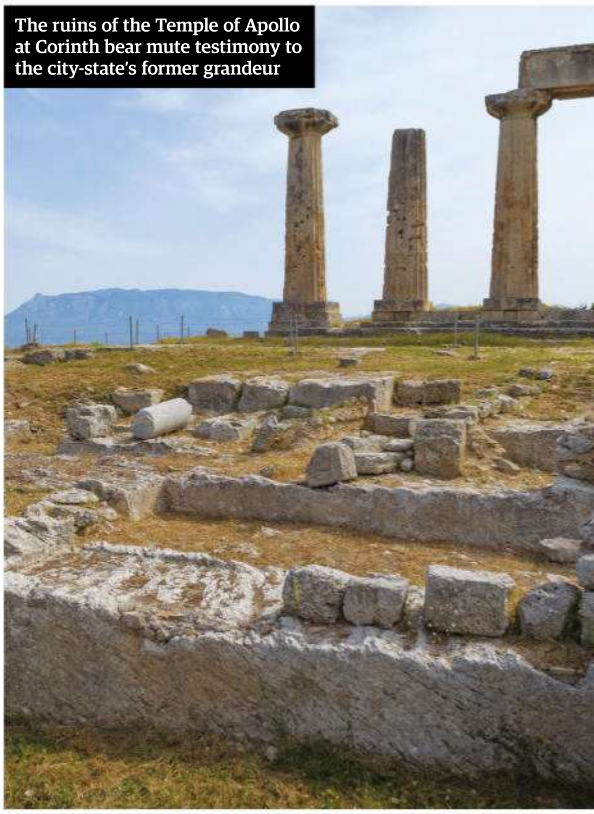
POWER AND POLITICS

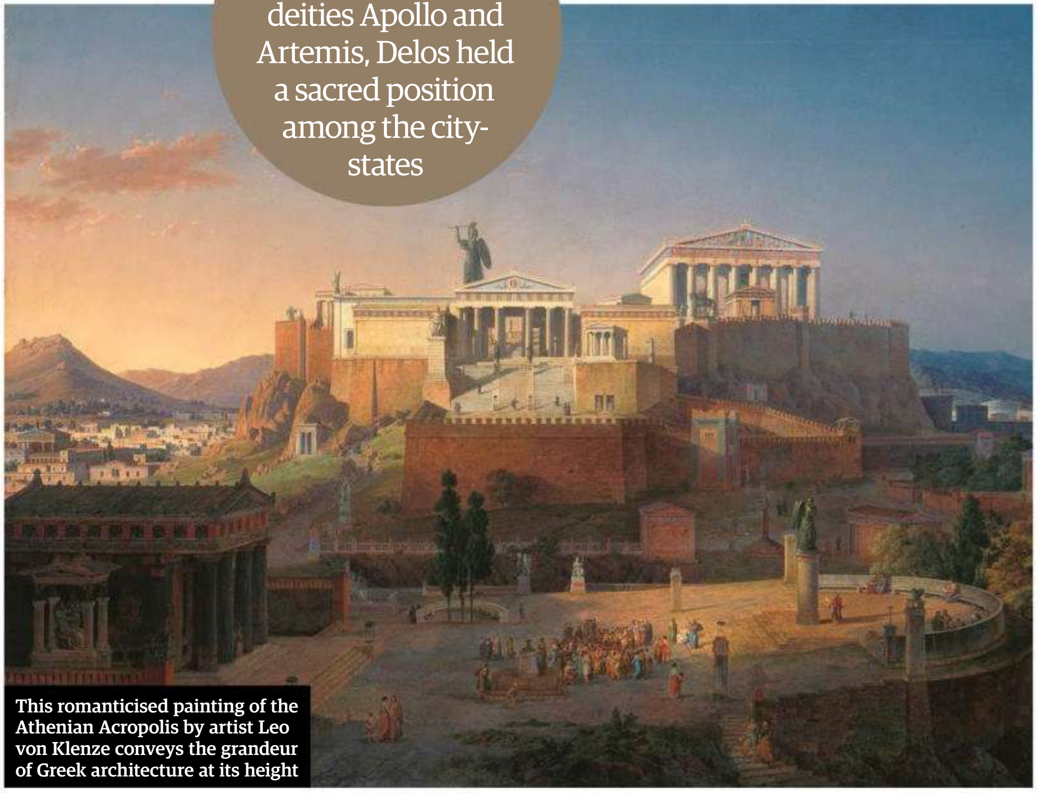
The early Greek city-states were governed by monarchs, representative of a small class of aristocratic landowners who had amassed significant wealth. Most of the city-states were small, some of them barely worthy of recognition as anything more than a village. Therefore, the use of the term 'king' or 'queen' to describe these early rulers is somewhat inaccurate. The aristocracy generally opposed the rule of any monarch in a permanent sense while also staunchly defending the political independence of their particular cities.

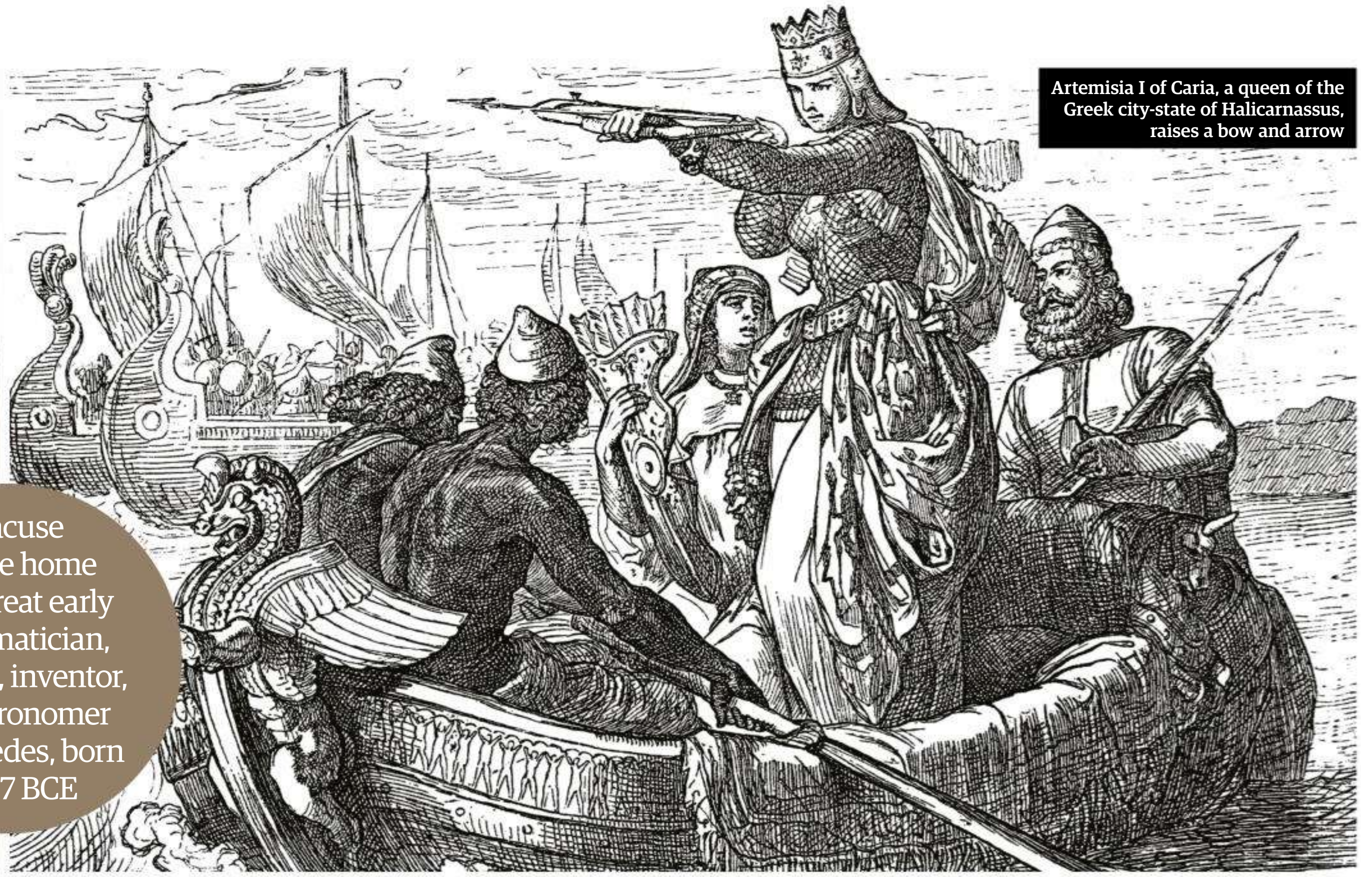
However, the continuing definition of social classes threatened the power of the aristocracy by the mid-6th century. The emergence of the merchant class broadened social contrasts and distinctions, particularly in the larger city-states, and gave rise to even greater discourse and class struggle. In numerous cases, as the aristocracy became increasingly unpopular, its rulers were supplanted by strongmen known as 'tyrants,' who rose to power – often from the fringe of society – with the support of the people. The term 'tyrant' itself did not originally convey the negative connotation that is associated with it today. Originally, tyrants were indeed authoritarian but no reference was made to cruelty or self-serving administration. While many of them ruled only a short time and the historical record relates that they were deposed, banished, assassinated, or even stoned to death, there were notable exceptions.

Cypselus ruled Corinth for 30 years and encouraged the city's colonisation of northwestern Greece. Modern historians view Cypselus as a demagogue, but he is believed to have been so popular that he did not require a bodyguard and moved freely among the people. He was succeeded by his son, Periander, who ruled Corinth for 40 years. Assessments of Periander's rule vary. Although some contemporary accounts portrayed

As the mythical birthplace of Greek deities Apollo and Artemis, Delos held a sacred position among the city-states


The ruins of the Temple of Apollo at Corinth bear mute testimony to the city-state's former grandeur


This romanticised painting of the Athenian Acropolis by artist Leo von Klenze conveys the grandeur of Greek architecture at its height



Artemisia I of Caria, a queen of the Greek city-state of Halicarnassus, raises a bow and arrow

> Syracuse was the home of the great early mathematician, physicist, inventor, and astronomer Archimedes, born in 287 BCE

him as a cruel dictator, others assert that he was just and equitable. Historians do remember him as one of the Seven Sages of Greece, prominent individuals who lived in the 6th century BCE and were known far and wide for their wisdom. Regardless, after Periander's death in 580 BCE, the Corinthian tyranny also faded away.

During the course of 200 years, the meaning of the word 'tyrant' did evolve to its present understanding. It should be noted, though, that the tyrants served as a bridge from authoritarian aristocratic rule to the more democratic forms of government that eventually emerged among the city-states.

SPARTAN STAND

Sparta was a notable exception to the rule of the tyrants. Ancient Greek historians relate that the Oracle of the sun god Apollo at Delphi guided the statesman and military commander Lycurgus to shape Spartan society on the pillars of three virtues: equality among the citizens of Sparta, military prowess, and austerity. Lycurgus is remembered as the legendary lawgiver of Sparta, and the constitution, sometimes referred to as the Great Rhetra, adopted by the city-state around 650 BCE preserved the power of the aristocracy, protected the rule of the two royal houses of Sparta, and initiated the societal structure that built the militaristic culture for which the city-state has earned enduring fame.

Spartan society emphasised loyalty to the city-state and service in the military, and Lycurgus is seen as the chief sponsor of its development. Social classes included the Spartans, also known as spartiates, who were full citizens, helots, who were serfs or slave labourers, and perioeci, craftsmen and merchants who were neither full citizens nor slaves. The word perioeci literally translates as 'dwellers around.'

Military service was compulsory in Sparta, and all male citizens were required to participate, essentially throughout their lives. At the age of seven, young boys were removed from their homes and entered the Agoge, a state-run system of education, physical training, and military indoctrination. Men under 30 years of age, even those who were married, were required to live in communal military barracks away from their wives and to eat meals at communal tables.

Spartan women, perhaps due in part to the commitment of males to the military, were well educated and generally enjoyed greater freedom than women of other Greek city-states. They

The Olympic Games

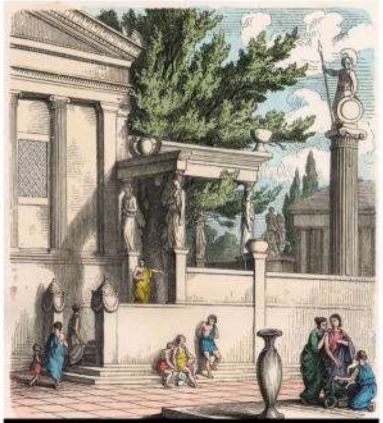
The first Olympic games took place in the cluster of gathering spaces, temples, and buildings at the sanctuary of Olympia in 776 BCE. Organised by leaders of the city-state of Elis, the games originated as a religious and athletic celebration that was to occur every four years, and during the peace or truce that was observed during the Olympics all disputes and armed conflict between rivals or warring city-states were suspended. The games included athletic competition and combat demonstrations, such as wrestling, chariot racing, distance running, and throwing the discus and javelin.

Although the actual origins of the Olympic Games remain somewhat mysterious, it is believed that the events promoted some measure of goodwill and cooperation among the city-states. Sacrifices to the gods were common, particularly to Zeus, whose great temple at Olympia was said to have housed a huge statue of the god, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, wrought from ivory and gold by the sculptor Phidias around 435 BCE. The Temple of Zeus, the Temple of Hera, a tomb-like structure called the Pelopion, and the altar on which sacrifices were performed, stood within the temenos, or sacred enclosure, at Olympia.

Extensive archaeological surveys have been conducted among the ruins of ancient Olympia, yielding fascinating artefacts related to the Olympic Games

The olive tree

The olive tree was such a driving force in the economies of the Ancient Greek city-states that it was believed to have been a gift of the gods, namely from Athena, the goddess of wisdom, from whom Athens took its name. The olive tree contributed to the prosperity of Greeks in many ways. Its wood was used in the construction of homes and ships. Its fruit was a staple of the Greek diet. Its oil served as fuel for lamps and was thought to have medicinal value. Its leaves were used to form the crowns worn by victorious athletes. Perhaps most significantly, its abundance allowed the export of its products to generate tremendous wealth for the city-states.
The origin of the olive tree was said to have been in a contest proposed by Zeus between Athena and Poseidon, god of the sea, to bestow a gift upon the people. Poseidon produced a salt spring by striking his trident on nearby rocks. Athena brought forth the olive tree, its branches swaying in the breeze and full of ripening fruit. The early Athenians were allowed to choose one of these gifts, and they selected the olive tree. Today, an olive tree grows on the Athenian Acropolis in remembrance of the myth.


This 19th century artist's interpretation depicts the sacred olive tree on the Acropolis in the city of Athens

engaged in sporting competitions, received formal schooling, and were allowed to own property.

ATHENS ASCENDANT

The Athenian king, or 'basileus,' ruled as early as the 9th century BCE with a group of influential nobles at court. By 683 BCE, though, the monarchy had been abolished, primarily through the action of the very nobles with which the king had been surrounded. The Athenian nobility amassed sizeable wealth and increasing political influence as their agricultural products were exported around the region.

As their wealth grew, Athenian noblemen began to gather to discuss political issues of the day. This gathering was called the 'Areopagus,' named for the prominent hill on which the men gathered. Rather than vesting most of the power in the hands of a single monarch, the Areopagus favoured government by a group of nine noblemen that were elected by their body. By the 8th century, an oligarchy had emerged from the deliberations of the Areopagus. Known as 'archons,' these chosen were empowered to make decisions affecting the lives of every Athenian; however, their power was held in check by the requirement that any decision be submitted to the entire Areopagus and approved first.

The oligarchy and Areopagus are evidence of the early stirrings of Athenian democracy. Still, there were significant class distinctions in the city-state, and the distribution of wealth was quite limited. Economic issues surfaced as subsistence farmers depleted the soil and were unable to produce crops that would sustain their families. In order to survive, they sold themselves and their families into servitude, essentially slavery. While the average farming family in Athens suffered, the aristocratic class continued to prosper.

One of the earliest of the Greek city-states, Argos was founded during the Mycenaean period

When economic disparity boiled over into civil unrest in the mid-7th century BCE, the oligarchy fell out of favour with the people. In its place rose a succession of so-called tyrants, who took control of the Athenian government with the support of the common people.

Most prominent among these tyrants was Solon, who came to power in 594 BCE. Solon established an aristocratic form of government that was loosely based on a constitution. He enacted sweeping reforms and is remembered to this day as the foremost proponent of redress for the lower classes of Athenians and as a lawgiver. Solon organised Athenian society into four distinct classes, or tribes, based upon their wealth, and established a representative body called the Council of 400, with 100 members of each tribe. The poorest social class was further represented by an assembly known as the Ecclesia of Demos.

The military strongman Peisistratus gained control in Athens in 560 BCE and ruled for the next half century. Although he maintained his tight grip on power through the presence of a loyal army, Peisistratus enacted measures to benefit Athens' subsistence farmers and to improve the infrastructure of the growing city-state, while substantially diminishing the power of the aristocratic class.

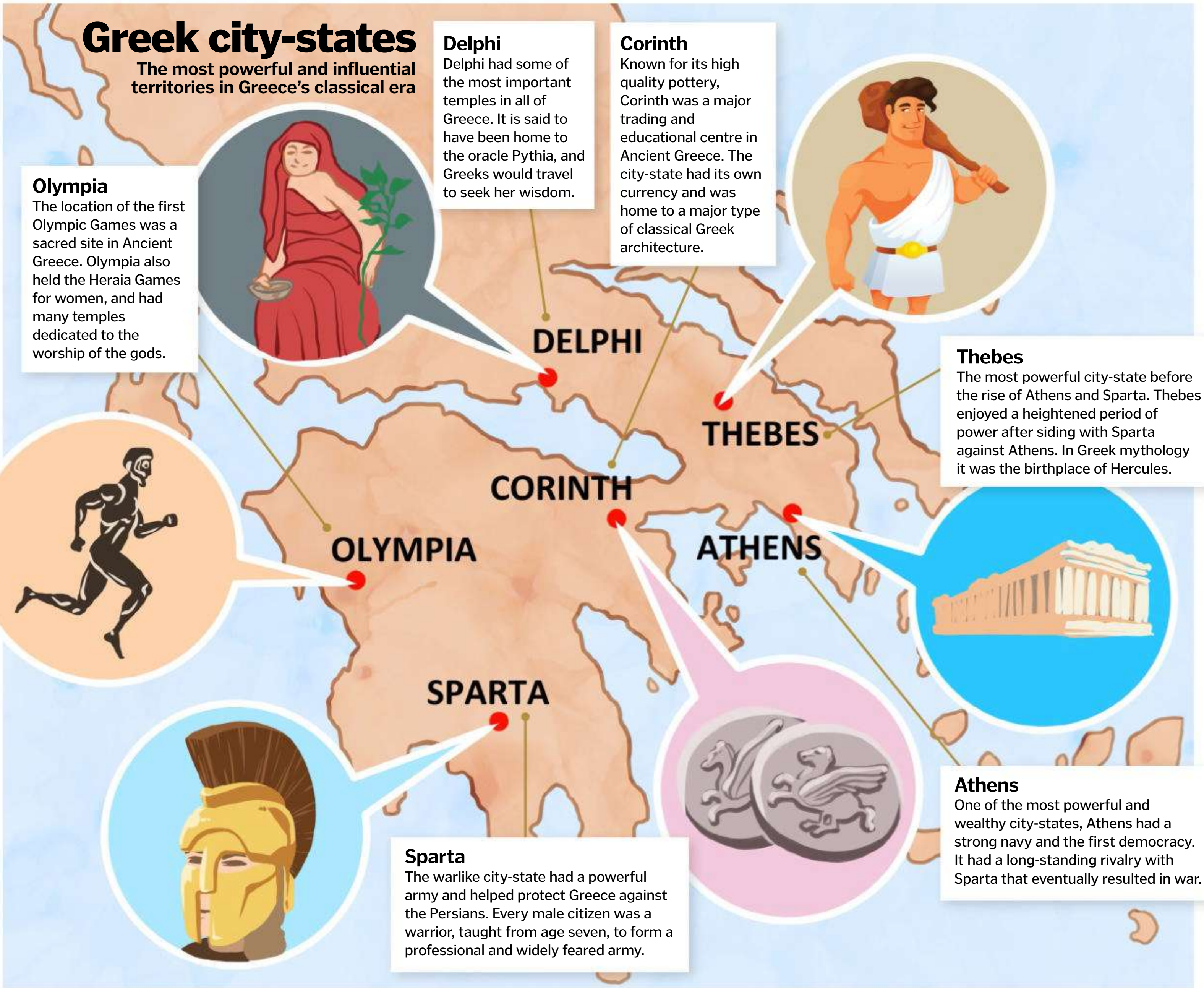
Under Cleisthenes, whose brief rule lasted only six years from 508 to 502 BCE, all free men living in Athens and the surrounding Attic Peninsula were granted citizenship, meaning that they were allowed to participate in the Athenian political process. The seeds of democracy had begun to take root in Athenian soil.

CITY-STATES PROLIFERATE

Athens and Sparta were not the only influential city-states. Corinth was reputed as a centre of decadent living but also as a hub of trade and commerce. Located on an isthmus that offered access to both the Aegean and Ionian seas and controlled access to the Peloponnese, Corinth was a prominent naval power that continually opposed Athenian influence and came to play a key role in the development of Greek culture. Thebes was also a powerful economic and military force during the era of the city-states and a principal adversary of Athens. The Theban army actually sided with Xerxes during the Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BCE. Rhodes was a maritime city-state that actually encompassed an entire island in the eastern Mediterranean. Its location astride busy trade routes allowed merchants to amass significant wealth.

The expansion of Greek culture and settlement gave rise to numerous city-states along the coast of Asia Minor and westward to Sicily, the Italian mainland, and the coast of North Africa. In the late 8th century BCE, settlers from the area of Corinth

Areopagus Hill was the site of meetings held by a group of Athenian noblemen, which eventually assumed its name



Greek city-states

The most powerful and influential territories in Greece's classical era

Delphi
Delphi had some of the most important temples in all of Greece. It is said to have been home to the oracle Pythia, and Greeks would travel to seek her wisdom.

Corinth
Known for its high quality pottery, Corinth was a major trading and educational centre in Ancient Greece. The city-state had its own currency and was home to a major type of classical Greek architecture.

Olympia
The location of the first Olympic Games was a sacred site in Ancient Greece. Olympia also held the Heraia Games for women, and had many temples dedicated to the worship of the gods.

Thebes
The most powerful city-state before the rise of Athens and Sparta. Thebes enjoyed a heightened period of power after siding with Sparta against Athens. In Greek mythology it was the birthplace of Hercules.

Athens
One of the most powerful and wealthy city-states, Athens had a strong navy and the first democracy. It had a long-standing rivalry with Sparta that eventually resulted in war.

Sparta
The warlike city-state had a powerful army and helped protect Greece against the Persians. Every male citizen was a warrior, taught from age seven, to form a professional and widely feared army.

founded Syracuse, which became the largest city in Sicily and waged war with the kingdom of Carthage for control of the island. In turn, Syracuse also established colonies along the coast of the Adriatic Sea. Around 600 BCE, adventurers from Phocaea, a city-state located on the coast of modern Turkey, sailed westward and founded the settlement of Massalia, which developed into a bustling western Mediterranean seaport and became modern Marseilles, France.

COMPETITION AND COOPERATION

The early rivalries that emerged among the Greek city-states emanated from the desire to control surrounding lands. The aristocratic ruling classes often disagreed, and at times these conflicts erupted into open warfare. In fact, at any given time in their turbulent history, two or more of the city-states were at war with one another. Inevitably as the territories of the city-states expanded, disputes over land and the definition of borders arose. Further, access to the sea and the exploitation of valuable resources such as timber, silver, and other commodities fuelled the rivalries between them.

Although most of the city-states banded together to defeat the Persian invasion of 480 BCE, the response to such an external threat merely postponed the coming of the catastrophic Peloponnesian War decades later. In the wake of the defeat of the Persians, Athens, with its unsurpassed naval supremacy, dominated the other city-states. The Athenians assembled the Delian League and in time transformed the alliance into something that resembled a protectorate or empire rather than a cooperative gathering of equal city-states. Corinth remained a staunch rival of Athens, and by 431 BCE the leaders of Sparta had come to recognise the threat posed by Athenian domination. The ruinous Peloponnesian War between Athens and the Delian League and the Spartan-led Peloponnesian League left Athens vanquished and Sparta preeminent but too weak to effectively assert control. In time, Thebes defeated Sparta and dominated Greek affairs for a brief period. Internal strife and armed conflict weakened the city-states and hastened their conquest by the Macedonian army of King Philip II, who defeated their alliance at Chaeronea in 338 BCE.

The development of the Greek city-states served as a catalyst for the expansion of Greek culture and influence across much of the known world. While their common heritage contributed to the collective realisation that all were 'Greek,' the city-states remained fiercely independent and in significant aspects of their societies, quite diverse.

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Everyday life in Ancient Greece

From the wealthiest citizens to the poorest slaves, discover what day-to-day life was like in the city-states

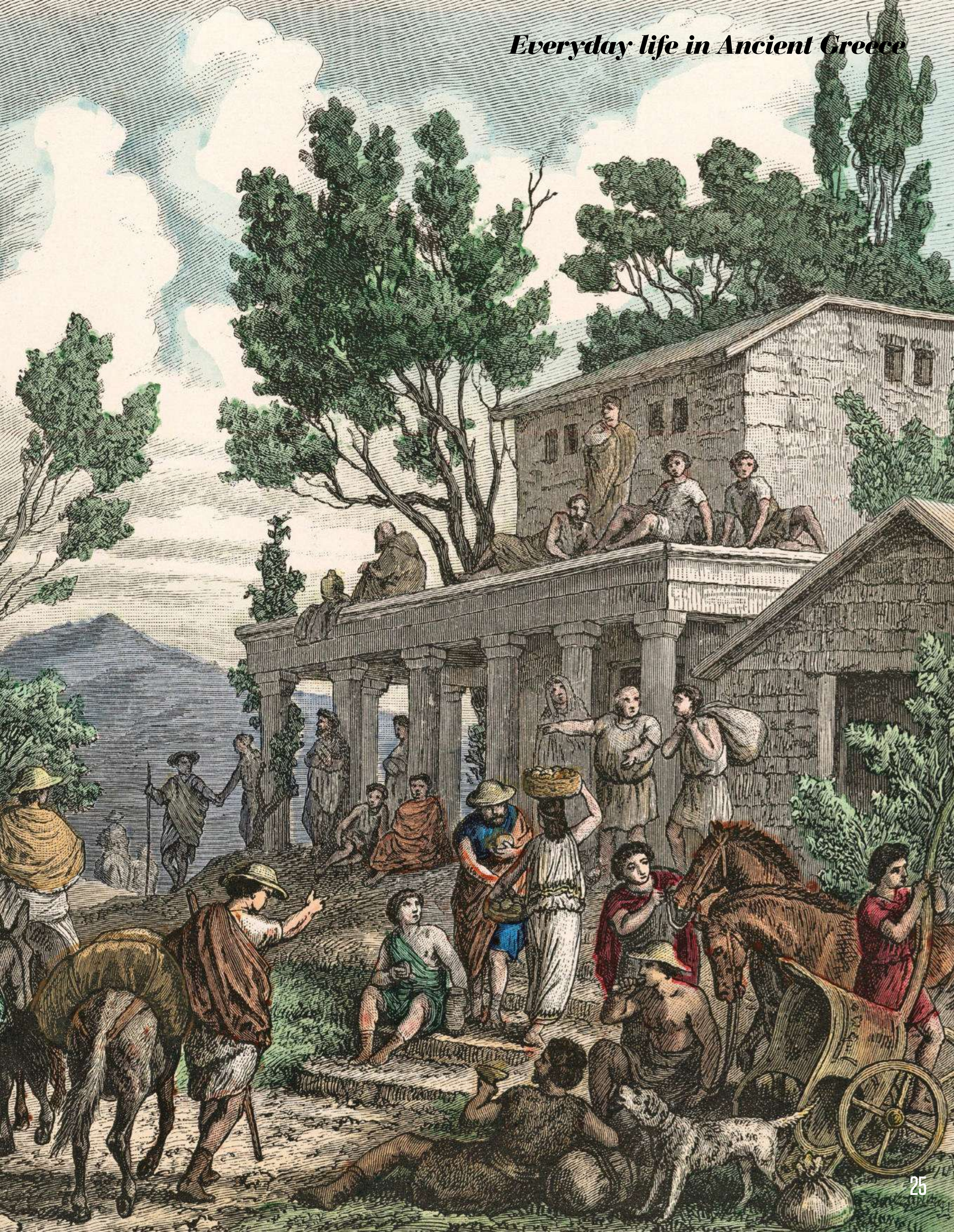
History often concentrates on the feats of great men, and that of Ancient Greece is no different. Generations of historians have written countless books about Alexander the Great, Homer and Socrates. But what about the average Greek who lived and died in the city-states without ever leading an army, penning an epic poem or founding a new philosophy? What did they do, where did they live, and what were they taught?

Fragmentary documents, records and archaeological evidence are providing the answers. The musings of philosophers often shed light on everyday activities, while epic poems describe the lives of the characters they feature. Archaeologists have unearthed the foundations of houses and analysed them to work out what happened inside. The objects they have found also provide clues: decorated vases show household scenes and discarded rubbish tells us about tools used in the workplace. Social historians have pieced it all together to plot the lives of the Ancient Greeks from the cradle to the grave.

Classical Athens left more sources of information than any other city-state – its population was more literate than any other in the world and there is an abundance of archaeological remains. So much of what we know about Ancient Greece is based on these remains. But we also know plenty about the city-state of Sparta; although its population was famously illiterate, generations of historians have found the warlike city-state to be a fascinating study. In other city-states, sources are lacking. Our knowledge of everyday life in Macedonia before Alexander the Great is shrouded in the mists of millennia.

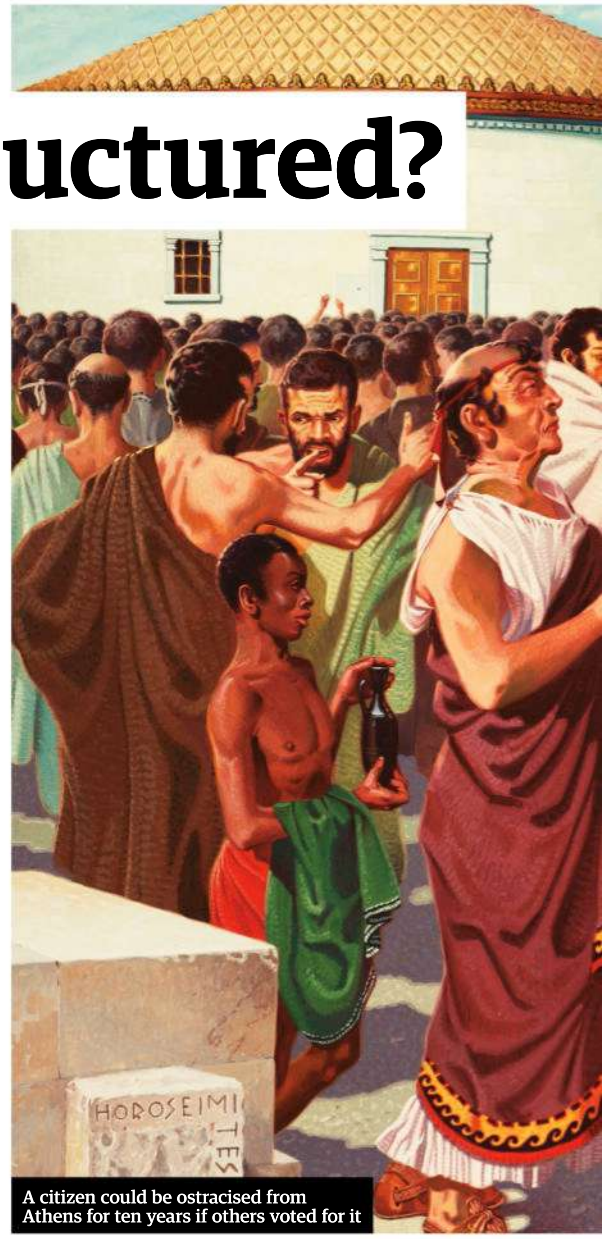
Join us on a journey to the past to find out more about Lycos the slave-ceramicist, Cephalus the shield maker and Pasion the money lender. This is less a story about great kings and great minds, and more about work, rest and play for the average Greek.

> Although 3% of Athens' population died in warfare every year, citizens still regarded military service as a privilege



A gravestone showing a slave attending to her deceased mistress

How was society structured?



A citizen could be ostracised from Athens for ten years if others voted for it

The hoplites stood in a line and lined up shoulder to shoulder, ready to receive the enemy's charge. In their right hand they carried a spear to kill the enemy, in their left they carried a shield which locked together in a long shield wall. Individually, the spearmen were vulnerable. Together, they presented a united, strong front – the much-feared phalanx.

The social structure that defined the city-states can be traced back to the battlefield. In order to function effectively, the phalanx required a large number of soldiers who were committed to maintaining the formation. If each soldier felt a part of the city-state for which they fought, they would be more likely to stand strong on the battlefield. Thus the idea of Greek citizenship was born – if every man was bound to fight in the phalanx on the battlefield, they should also be bound to political participation in the city-state.

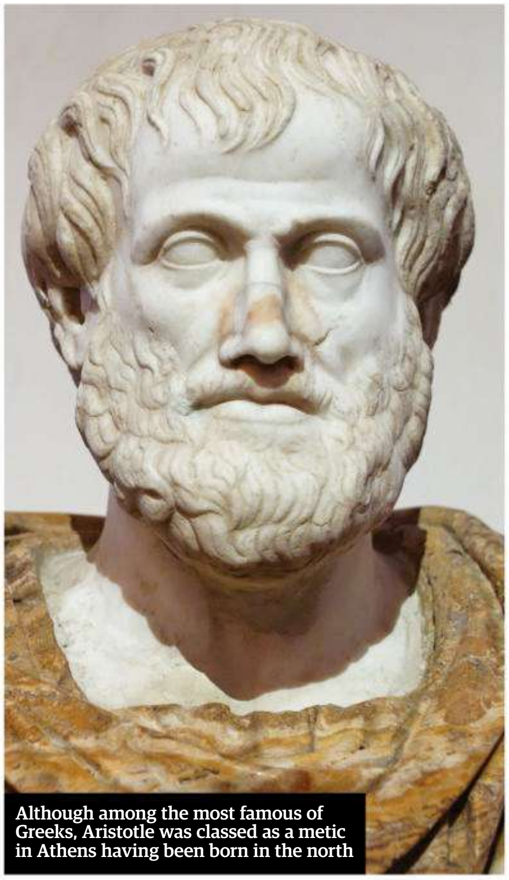
The most demanding duty for a citizen was service in the phalanx when called upon – and considering that most city-states went to war in three out of every four years, they would be called upon often – but citizens also had civic responsibilities. They had to serve on 501-men juries (so large to prevent any bribery of the jurors) and most would be called to serve on the Council of 500. They would receive a moderate payment for their duties, but not much more than a token gesture. Wealthy citizens were expected to pay tax at times of emergency, such as during the Peloponnesian War, and were also subject to liturgies to pay for specified things – perhaps a trireme, a festival or a new gymnasium. These sponsorships were not seen as a burden and different citizens competed to provide the best facilities for the state.

Citizenship was the ideal in Ancient Greece, although it was limited to adult males who had completed their military training. Others lived in the city-states too, although their status varied depending upon their position.

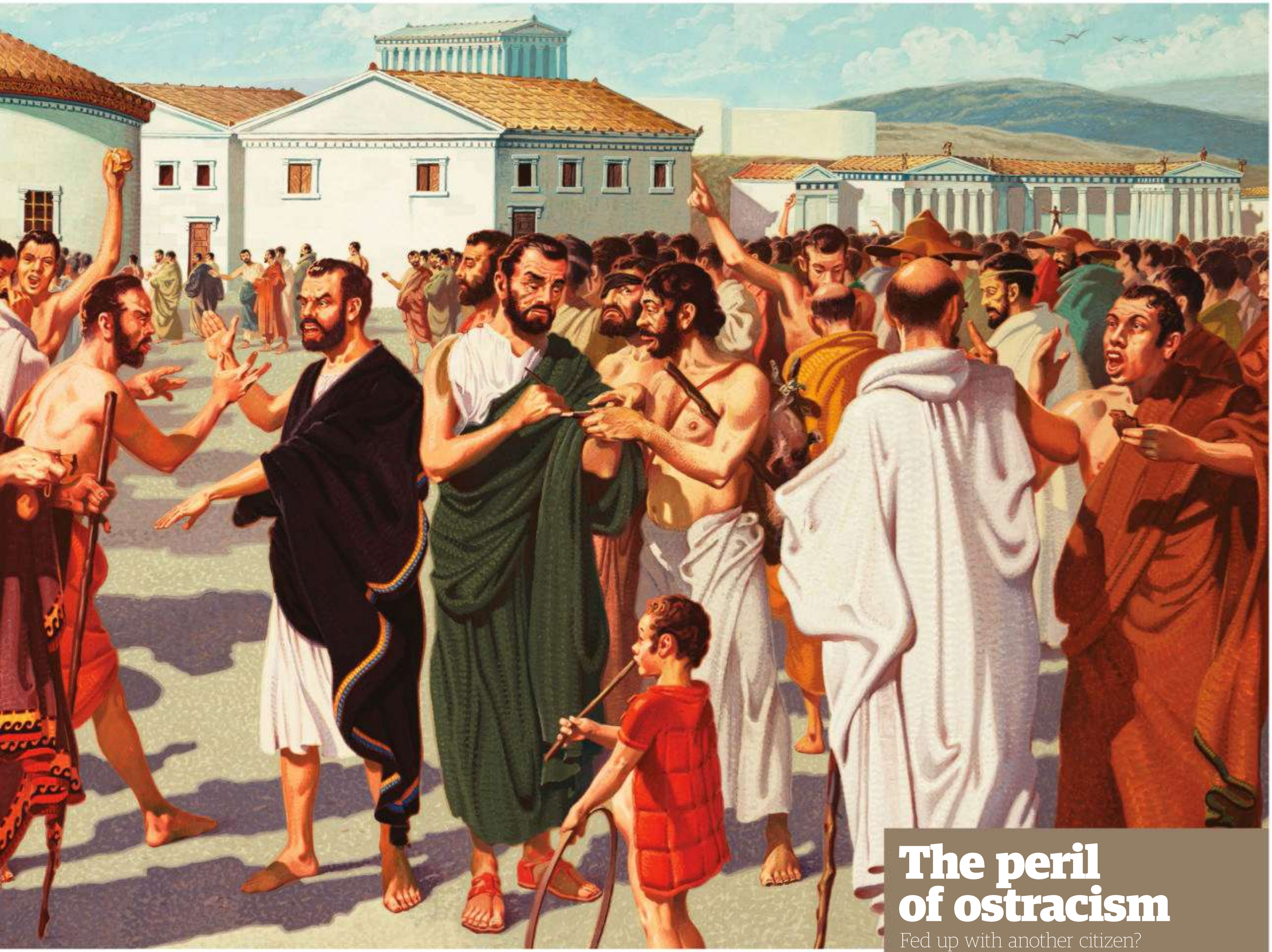
Foreign-born residents of Athens were known as metics. Although they were liable for military service, they did not have citizenship and were unable to vote, hold office or own land. They did, however, have the right to judicial representation. Despite the disadvantages of being a metic, Athens received a flood of immigrants following the Persian Wars of the early 5th century BCE as Ionians fled to a place of safety. They were forced to pay a one drachma per month poll tax or else face enslavement. Numbers continued to grow throughout the next few decades, reaching 20,000 by 431 BCE, perhaps ten per cent of the total Athenian population. It was a considerable minority who played an important role in city life.

A cache of 190 ostraka dumped in a well, all inscribed with similar handwriting, may be evidence of Athenian electoral fraud

At the bottom of the social hierarchy were the slaves, making up a quarter of the population of Athens. An inescapable facet of Greek society, the work done by slaves enabled citizens to have the time to take part in the democratic system. Slave-owning was usually small scale as little profit was to be made in the buying and selling of them. An unskilled slave typically cost around 200 drachmae, or 200 times the amount of a worker's daily wage. Skilled slaves might cost three times



Although among the most famous of Greeks, Aristotle was classed as a metic in Athens having been born in the north



the amount, while one particular slave-prostitute exchanged hands for 3,000 drachmae.

Many female slaves were used for domestic service, preparing food and helping around the house. However, this often left them at risk of abuse at the hands of their masters. Male slaves were often set up in their own workshops where they would work at a trade, occasionally earning enough money on the side to buy their freedom – a free slave was given the same rights as a metic.

The status of women was often little better than that of the slave, especially in Athens. Women were excluded from political participation, could not own property in their own right and were usually dependent on their husband, father or male relatives. Most of their lives were spent stuck inside, weaving and playing music. Since shopping was usually done by slaves, the best opportunity women had to leave the house was to collect water – though rich women had slaves for this too.

Only in terms of religion were Athenian women provided with opportunities for independence. The patron goddess of the city, Athena, was served by female priestesses, while other gods also had priestesses at the centre of their worship. Only women celebrated the festival of Thesmophoria, honouring Demeter and the successful harvest. The spring festival in honour of Dionysus, the god of wine, was particularly raucous. Women would leave the city and drink copious quantities of wine and men were advised to give the celebrating women a wide berth.

"The spring festival in honour of Dionysus was particularly raucous"

The peril of ostracism

Fed up with another citizen? Send them into exile!

Although being a citizen carried certain benefits, it also brought with it disadvantages, chief among which was the threat of ostracism. Once a year, Athenians citizens were asked if they wanted to ostracise one of their number. If the answer was yes, a vote was held during which each citizen placed the name of another on a piece of pottery named an ostraka, from which the process of ostracism got its name. The nominations were tallied and the person with the most votes – as long as a minimum number or quorum was reached – was exiled from Athens. The ostracised citizen had ten days to leave the city and would be executed if they returned, although their property and possessions were protected and they were free to return after ten years had passed.

Ostracism was designed to neutralise a threat to the city-state and prevent individual citizens from becoming so powerful that they became a tyrant. However, the system was open to abuse. Some ostracised citizens were victims of personal grudges. On one occasion, statesman and general Aristides the Just offered to help an illiterate citizen inscribe his ostraka. Not recognising his helper, the citizen asked Aristides to write his own name: "It's simply that I'm tired of hearing how good he is." Aristides went on to amass the most votes and was ostracised, but was recalled to help fight the Persian invasion of 479 BCE.

What was domestic life like?

Early Greek houses tended to be simple two-room dwellings with an open porch and a low-pitched pediment, a style which manifested itself in later classical temple architecture. However, domestic home design soon moved on to courtyard residences which housed extended families. Husband and wife, children, grandparents, unmarried siblings and household slaves all lived under one roof – although slave quarters would have been kept very separate from the family and may sometimes have been in a different building.

Girls tended to spend their lives isolated in the home. They would be betrothed early, often around the age of five, and would marry when they came of age around 16 – her groom would be around 30. The wedding festivities lasted three days. Sacrifices would be made to Artemis, the goddess of virginity, and Hera, wife of Zeus and the goddess of marriage. The bride would dispose of her childhood toys before being ritually bathed and dressed. The groom would arrive at the bride's house having been similarly prepared and, after a banquet, would return to his own home with his new bride and the dowry her father provided.

However, the wife would have little more freedom in her new home than she would have done as a child. Women would spend much of their lives in the confines of the home with only domestic chores to do. This included weaving, which remained a household task rather than becoming a trade. The women of the household were largely restricted to the gynaikon, rooms on the upper floor, including at night – husbands and wives usually slept separately.

Men also had their own rooms in the house, called the andron. Here, men would relax during the day – assuming that they were not working or attending civic duties – and entertain at night. There was little organised recreation in the city-states, so Greeks would invite guests to a party called a symposium (meaning 'drinking together'). This was a ritualised institution that began with the serving of dinner. After the food was cleared away, garlands of flowers would be worn and drinks – wine only, as the Greeks did not drink beer – would be distributed. Libations would be taken to honour various gods and strict rules were in place to ensure that things did not get out of hand, although there is plenty of evidence that many symposia ended in quarrels or drunken orgies. Although women were banned, female flute players and dancers were often employed as entertainment, while slave girls would be used to serve the wine.

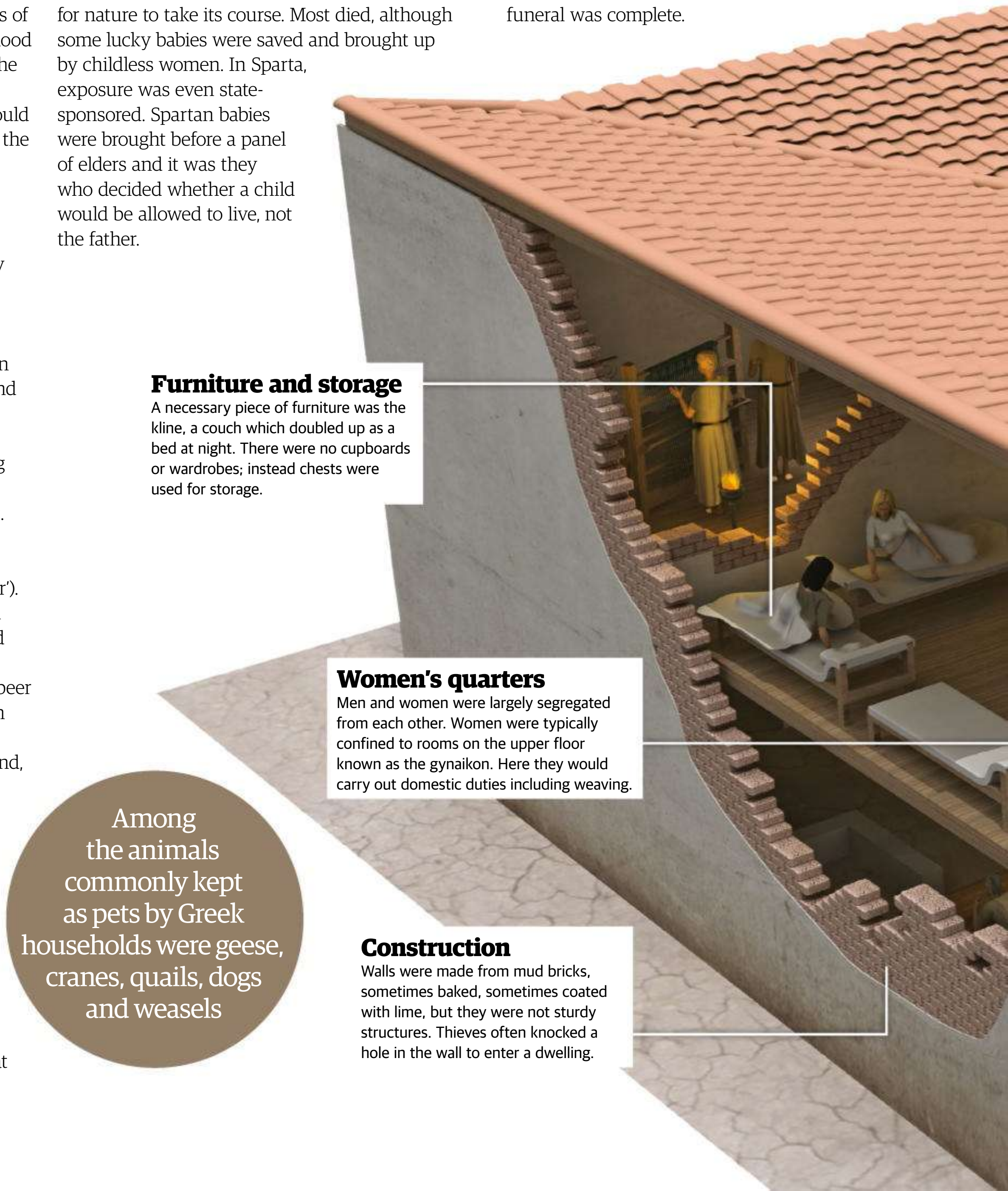
Separate male and female living quarters were a luxury that the poorest citizens could not afford. They had one-room abodes that were partitioned using temporary, moveable walls. They did not have the space to host a symposium so would leave the house to drink at a bar. These ranged from a simple street stall to multi-room buildings which served food and wine and offered torches so patrons could make their way home along the city's unlit streets.

Although most men and women kept to separate quarters by day and night, Ancient Greece managed to maintain a high birth rate. Once a wife provided her husband with a male heir, her status would rise. However, unwanted pregnancies and children were common. To deal with the problem, Greeks used a drastic measure: infanticide. Although the physical killing of a child was classed as murder and punishable by the state, it was perfectly acceptable for a father to reject an unwanted child; either because it was deemed sickly or unfit, or merely because it was a girl. In these cases, the baby was left outside the city for nature to take its course. Most died, although some lucky babies were saved and brought up by childless women. In Sparta, exposure was even state-sponsored. Spartan babies were brought before a panel of elders and it was they who decided whether a child would be allowed to live, not the father.

The lucky Greek child who was rescued or deemed fit to live spent their first years in the female rooms of the house. Rich families would employ a wet nurse, while poorer mothers would take on childcare themselves. Nearly all children would be read the stories from Aesop's *Fables*. At the age of six, the next stage in their education would begin.

Where there is birth, there is also death. If a family member died, responsibility for preparing the body fell to those remaining in the house and the body would remain in the home for up to three days. Demonstrations of grief were public, with much tearing of clothes and hair, loud crying and refusal to eat – behaviours which were thought to comfort the deceased, who would temporarily reside between this world and the next until the funeral was complete.

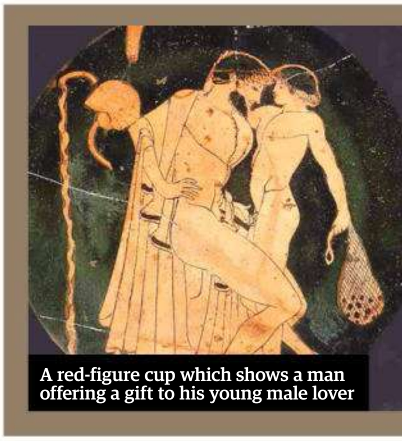
Among the animals commonly kept as pets by Greek households were geese, cranes, quails, dogs and weasels



Furniture and storage
A necessary piece of furniture was the kline, a couch which doubled up as a bed at night. There were no cupboards or wardrobes; instead chests were used for storage.

Women's quarters
Men and women were largely segregated from each other. Women were typically confined to rooms on the upper floor known as the gynaikon. Here they would carry out domestic duties including weaving.

Construction
Walls were made from mud bricks, sometimes baked, sometimes coated with lime, but they were not sturdy structures. Thieves often knocked a hole in the wall to enter a dwelling.



A red-figure cup which shows a man offering a gift to his young male lover

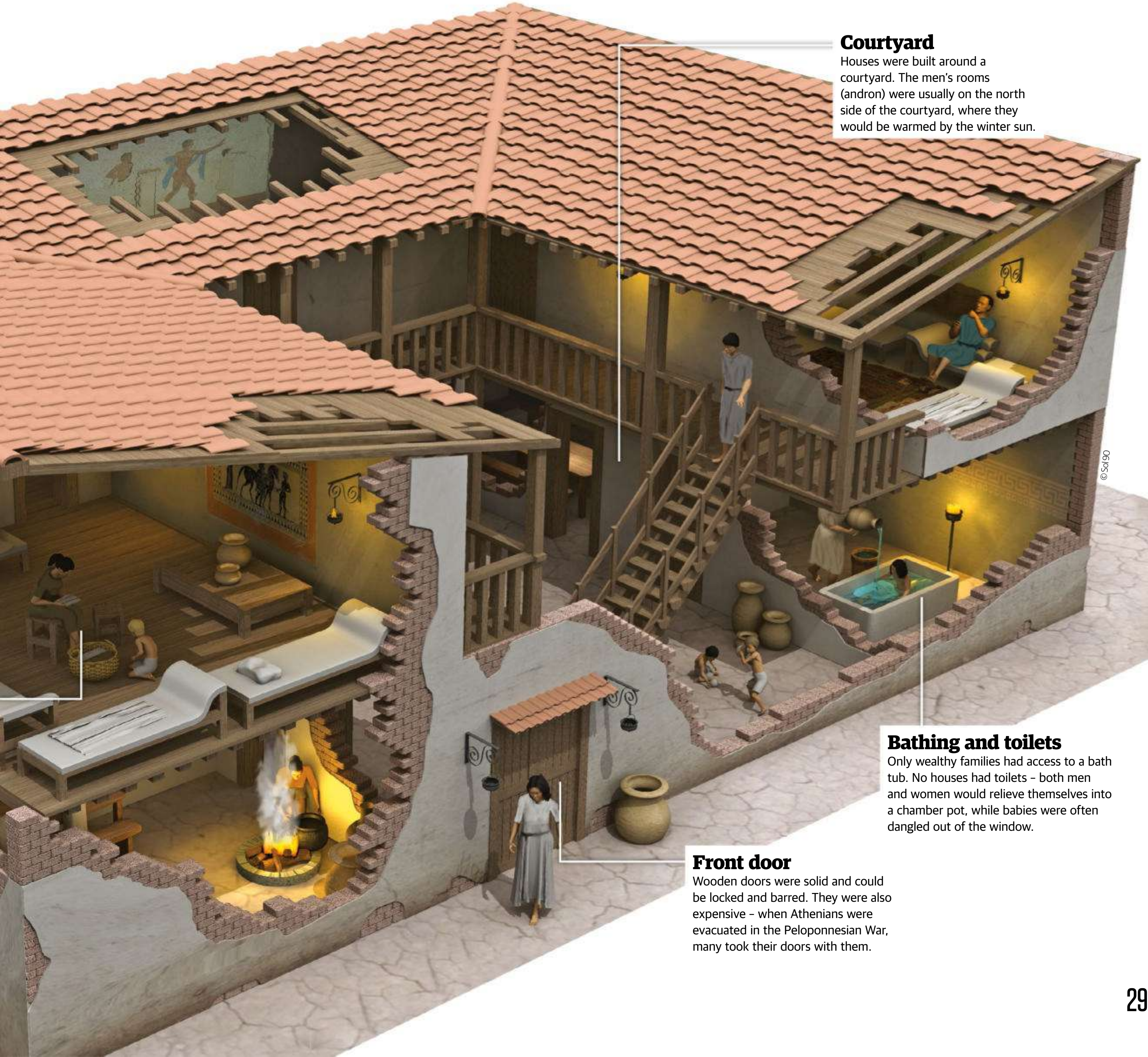
Pillow talk

Jump in bed with the Ancient Greeks to discover the truth behind prostitution and pederasty

According to the playwright Aristophanes, humans originally had four arms, four legs and two sets of genitals: either two male, two female or one of each. But Zeus split everyone in two, forcing them to look for their other half, and their sexual orientation was determined by the genitals of the half they searched for. It's a comic anecdote, but it does suggest that Greeks accepted homosexuality.

Many Greek men had relationships with adolescent boys, often beginning with a ritualised kidnapping with the permission of the boy's father. As long as the relationship was between social equals and suitably conducted, few Greeks batted an eyelid. However, when the boy reached adulthood, the relationship would end. Although pederasty was considered entirely acceptable, sex between adult males was seen as absurd.

Yet heterosexuality was still the norm. Marriages were usually arranged between men and women, and the family units they created were the core building blocks of the city-state. Although marriages were supposed to be monogamous, both married and unmarried men made use of prostitutes. Grand hetaerae charged hundreds of drachmae and often became the lovers of great men, while lower down the social scale, Kerameikos was the red-light district where Athens' streetwalkers plied their trade.



Courtyard

Houses were built around a courtyard. The men's rooms (andron) were usually on the north side of the courtyard, where they would be warmed by the winter sun.

Bathing and toilets

Only wealthy families had access to a bath tub. No houses had toilets – both men and women would relieve themselves into a chamber pot, while babies were often dangled out of the window.

Front door

Wooden doors were solid and could be locked and barred. They were also expensive – when Athenians were evacuated in the Peloponnesian War, many took their doors with them.

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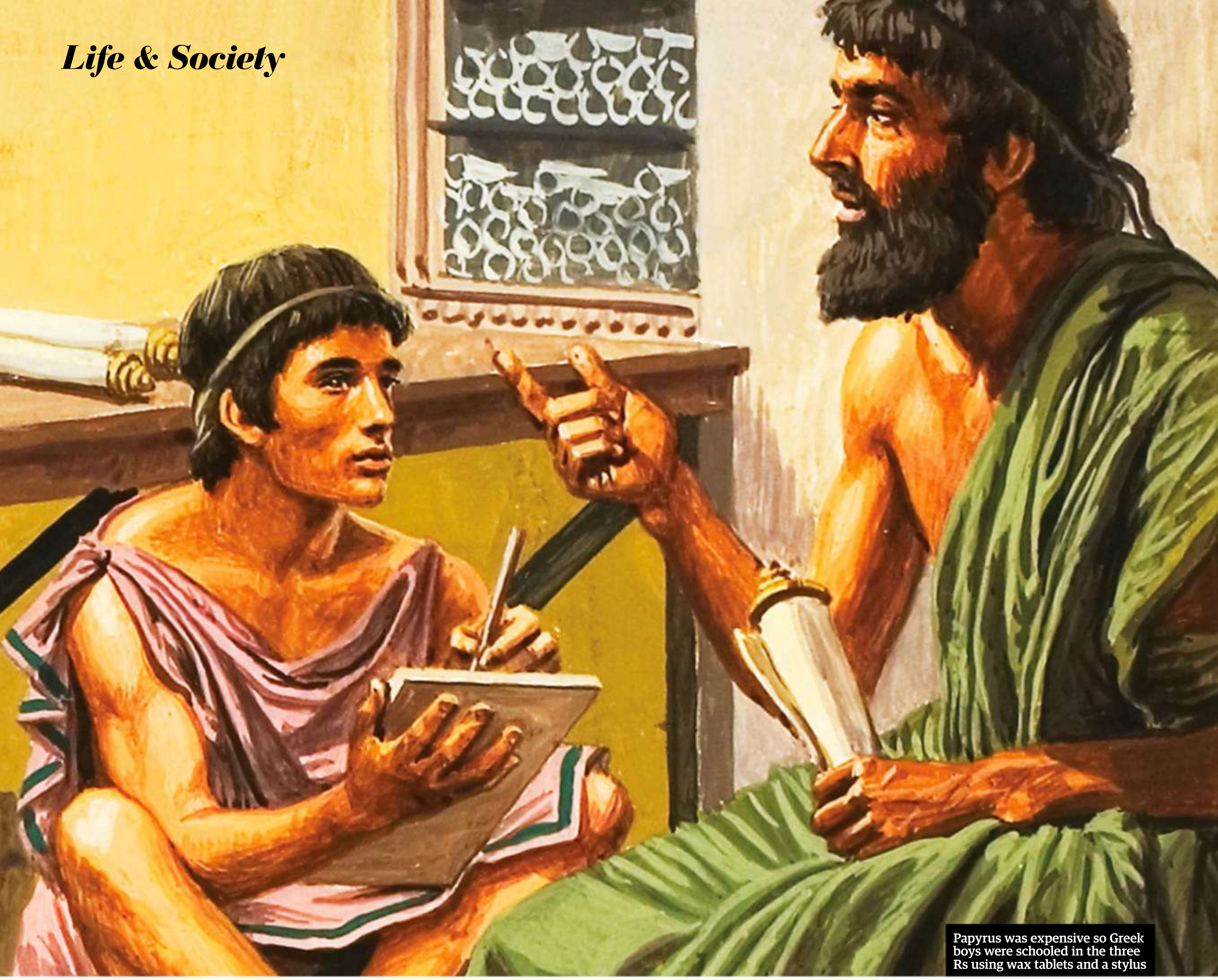


Papyrus was expensive so Greek boys were schooled in the three Rs using wax tablets and a stylus

How were children taught?

Aristotle, one of the greatest Greek minds, declared that, "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet." Most Greek city-states regarded education as an important tool to help its people become effective citizens of the future. However, the city-states actually played little role in teaching the young, leaving the education of children in the hands of their parents and private teachers. Only at the age of 18 did the city-state step in and demand that boys – now classed as ephebe – undergo two years of military service.

Early education occurred in an informal setting, usually at home, where a child was taught by their mother or a slave. From the age of six, most Greek boys attended three different types of classes. They paid for the privilege, although fees were often low enough that all but the poorest families could send their children to them for at least a few years. Lessons were usually held in the house of the tutor with ten or 20 boys attending each class. Boys from the wealthiest families were often accompanied by a paidagogos, a household slave who escorted them to school and took care of them during the day, but it was illegal for any adult other than the slave or teacher to enter the classroom.

No more than 30% of the Greek population was literate, although some slaves were trained to read and write

The first type of teacher, a grammatistes, would instruct boys in the three Rs. There were no desks, students would sit on stools and write using wax tablets and a stylus made from bone or metal. When they were ready to deal with longer works, boys were expected to learn the poems of Homer and be able to recite long passages. In the second type of class, a kitharistes (lyre player) would teach mousike, a combination of music, dance, lyrics and poetry. Most boys would learn to play musical instruments, usually the lyre, flute and pipes.

However, the most important school was the gymnasium supervised by paidotribes (physical trainers), where students were schooled in sports such as wrestling, running, discus and javelin. Physical training was seen as necessary for good health, to improve one's appearance and, most importantly, to prepare boys for the citizen-army. As a result, the paidotribes were the most highly paid of all teachers.

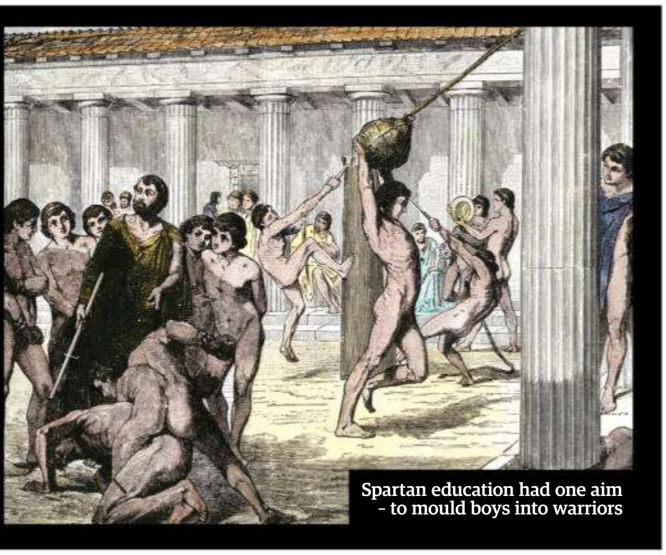
Most boys' education ended when they reached adolescence and began to learn a trade. However,

This is Sparta

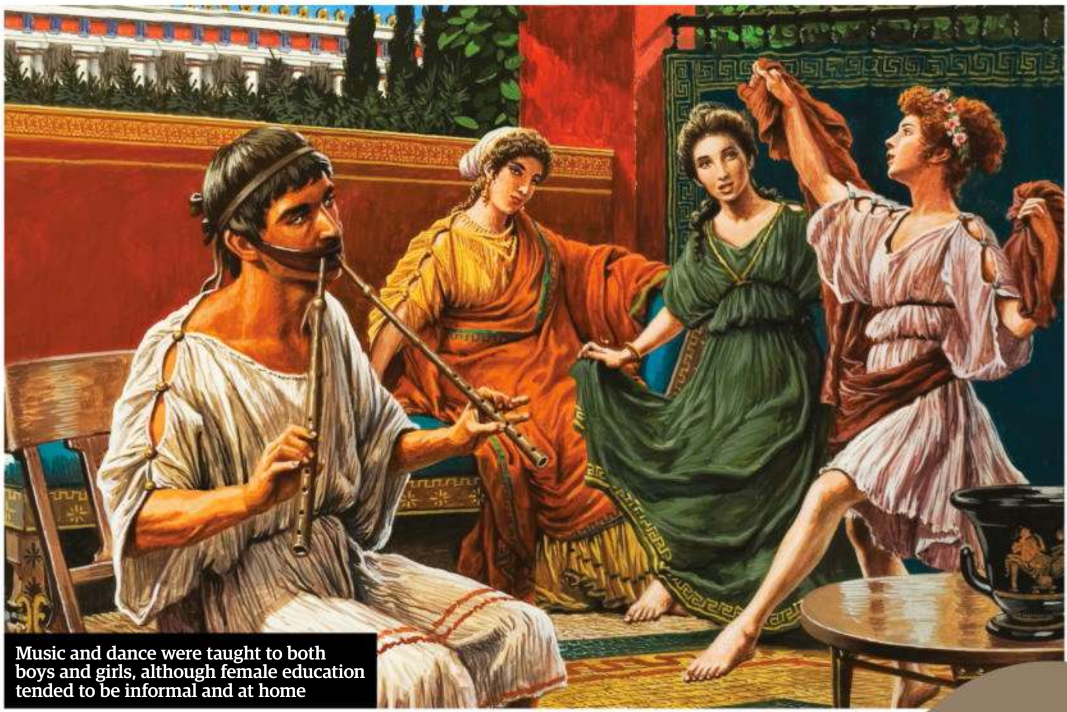
How did Greece's militaristic city-state train a new generation of warriors?

Although most Ancient Greek city-states aimed to prepare boys to become effective citizens, Sparta had a more singular objective: to train boys to take their place in the phalanx. In order to do this, education was state controlled in Sparta. Boys entered the agoge – a military school – when they were about seven years old. For the next 12 years, boys slept in the barracks with their classmates and were instructed by veteran soldiers. It was a brutal environment. Boys were purposely given little food and clothing to encourage them to forage, steal and endure hunger. Punishments gradually became harsher and physical training became harder in order to build up strength and stamina. Although reading and writing was taught, it was not considered important beyond being able to understand military messages. Music and dancing also formed part of the curriculum, but even that had a military edge – it would aid the boys' ability to move en masse in the phalanx.

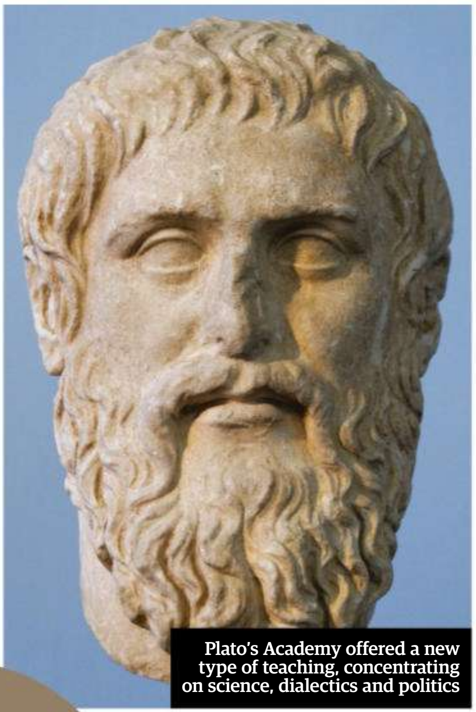
The culmination of the agoge came when the best students were instructed to hunt down and kill a slave. If caught, the boy would be disciplined – not for murder, but for his inability to commit the killing without being discovered. After the agoge, another exhaustive two years of military training would follow. Only then would the 20-year-old Spartan be considered a warrior ready to take his place on the battlefield.



Spartan education had one aim – to mould boys into warriors



Music and dance were taught to both boys and girls, although female education tended to be informal and at home



Plato's Academy offered a new type of teaching, concentrating on science, dialectics and politics

those from wealthier families would continue their paid education under sophists, itinerant philosopher-teachers who would travel from town to town teaching rhetoric. For young Greeks with political ambitions, rhetoric was a key skill. Being able to speak well, to sway the assembly or law courts, was the path to power. Isocrates opened up a permanent school of rhetoric in Athens around 392 BCE and his unusually high fees allowed him to amass a considerable fortune.

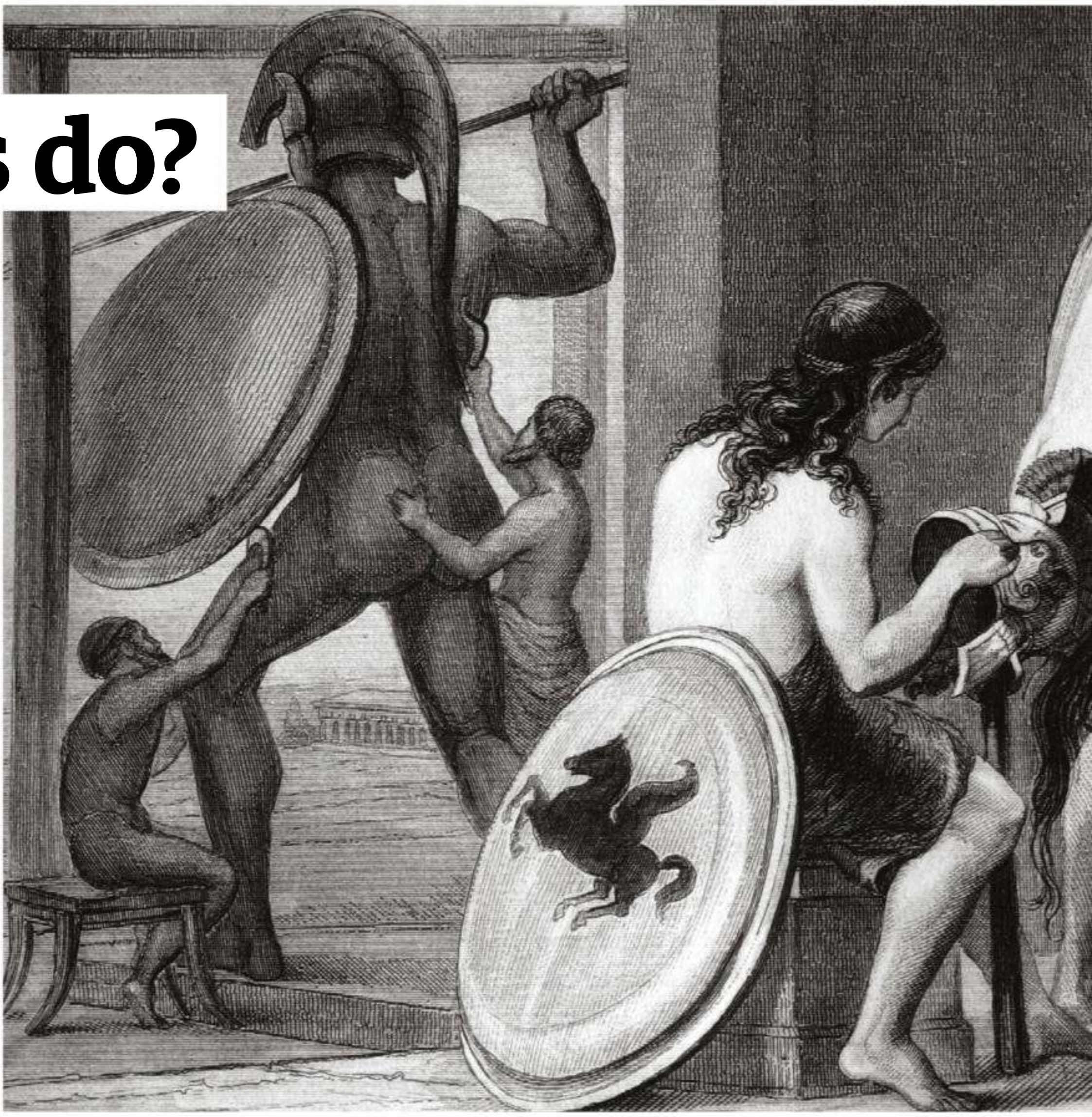
However, not all Athenians were convinced of the value in Isocrates' lessons. Some Athenians blamed their problems on an overemphasis on rhetoric in the education system. As a democratic city, important decisions were made by votes of all Athenian male citizens meeting in an assembly. After a series of questionable decisions, Athens was conquered by Sparta. Many Athenians blamed their fall on education: not because citizens did not understand what they were voting on, but because teaching rhetoric allowed some people to persuade the assembly to make poor decisions.

With the growth of philosophy in Greece, the idea of education as a lifelong passion began to emerge. Sometime after 387 BCE, when Plato is thought to have returned from his first visit to Italy and Sicily, he opened the Academy in Athens – often thought of as the first university. Essentially a club for interested and interesting minds, the Academy did not charge a fee for lessons, but nor was it open to the public. There was no formal curriculum or distinction between teachers and students, but members studied mathematics, science, dialectics and politics – unlike Isocrates, Plato placed little value on rhetoric. Among the Academy's pupils was Aristotle, who studied there for 20 years before tutoring Alexander the Great and founding his own school, the Lyceum.

Although formal education was limited to boys across most of Greece, wealthier girls were taught at home – often by a slave – and instructed how to read, write and play the lyre. Only in Sparta were girls given a formal education. As well as being taught how to sing, dance and play music, Spartan women were instructed in physical education and taught to run, wrestle and throw. The idea was that strong women would produce strong children, and that Spartan women could be used as a defence force in the last resort.

> The Library of Alexandria is said to have contained over half a million papyrus rolls, double that of any other library

What jobs did Greeks do?



For most Ancient Greek men, the ideal way to spend life was as a gentleman of leisure. Released from the need to work to live, such a gentleman could dedicate themselves to the political and social obligations placed upon them by the city-state. If a citizen was to play his role in direct democracy to full effect, he should be well informed and able to take part in the discussions and debates that moulded policy.

Yet the vast majority of Greeks were not so lucky that they could spend their days gossiping in the Agora. More than half of Attica's population worked in the countryside – although many would have lived inside the city walls for security – tending small plots of land that they either owned themselves or rented from richer landlords in return for a percentage of the yield. Barley and wheat were the staple crops, supplemented by olives, cabbages, onions and lettuce.

For those who worked within the city walls, the majority were tradesmen who saw to the day-to-day needs of the population: blacksmiths, sculptors, painters, carpenters and the like. Many were citizens, although undoubtedly of a lower social class than the gentry, but others were foreign-born metics or slaves who were engaged in a trade on behalf of their owner. These slaves had a degree of independence in their lives compared to those who worked in the house as domestic servants, but any money they made would belong to their owner – although some were allowed to keep a small share. Among the slave artisans who are known to have worked in Athens was Lydos, who stamped 'Lydos the slave' on any vases he produced.

Some tradesmen could gain extraordinary wealth through their skilled hands. When Demosthenes the knife maker died, he left behind an estate equivalent to 220 times the annual salary of a labourer. When Cephalus of Syracuse set up a shield-making workshop in Piraeus, his business grew to the extent that he had 120 slaves working under him. However, success on such a scale was rare and Demosthenes and Cephalus were exceptions.

It wasn't just slaves who were employed by the more successful tradesmen – poorer citizens would be given jobs in workshops too, although being in the employ of other Greeks was considered an embarrassment. It was a status perhaps even lower than that of a slave, because at least a slave had a degree of job security.

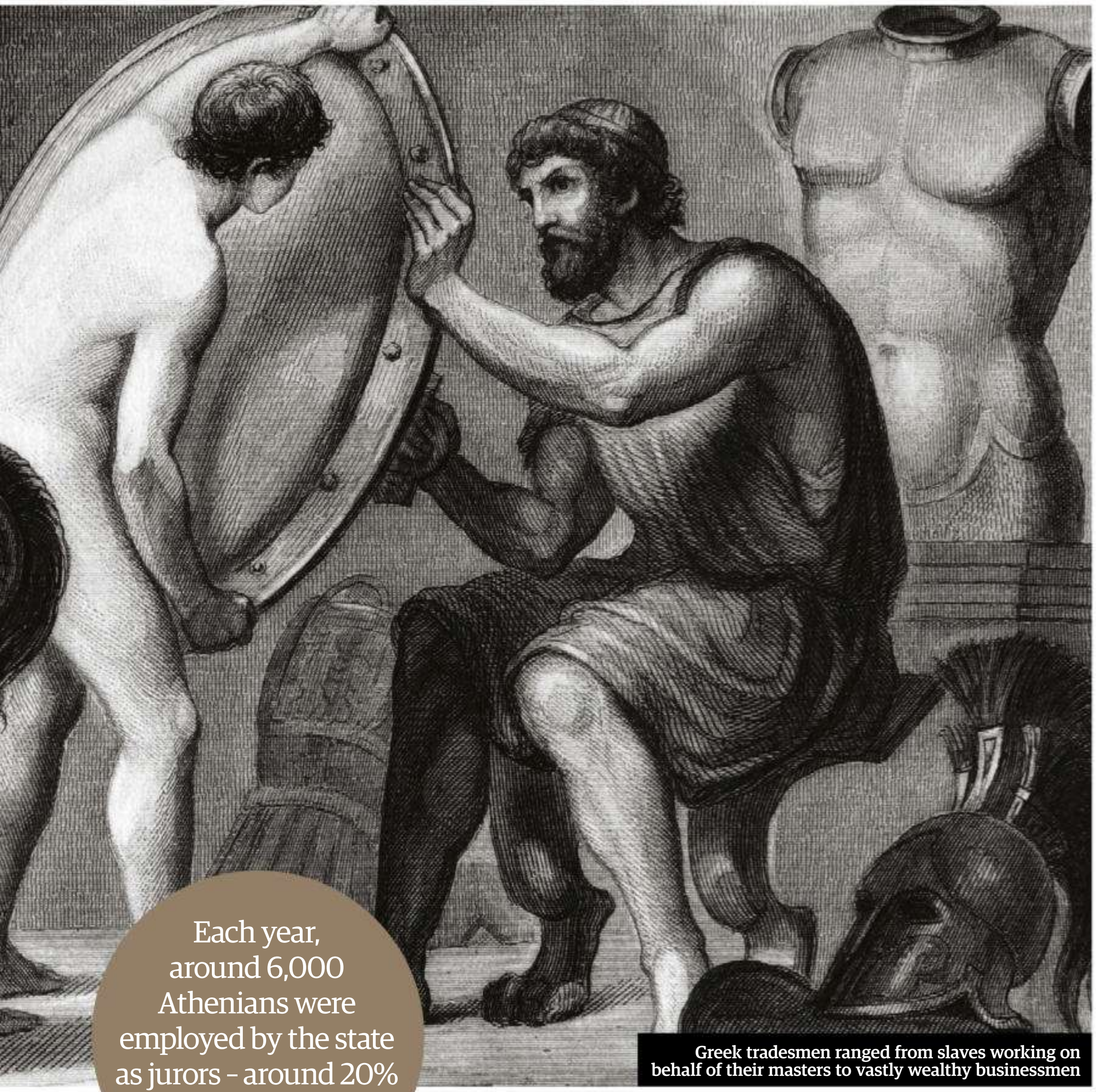
As trade routes developed, connecting Greeks to each other and the wider world, including Persia, India, Britain and China, city-states began to specialise in certain trades. Corinth was known for its ceramicists who crafted the pottery amphorae which carried olive oil and wine across Greece and the known world, although its ceramicists were later displaced by those from Athens. Corinth later found a new speciality in metalwork, while the best textiles came from Miletus and the best parchment from Kerameikos.

One result of increased trade and prosperity was the growth of a new industry, banking and money lending. Merchants who could not afford large outlays of money would borrow using letters of credit, repaying what they owed on the completion of their voyages. It led to the development of a complicated financial system that required some Ionian city-states to employ financial advisers to keep track of the flow of money. It also provided a rare opportunity for advancement. In Athens, a slave called Pasion showed such wit when running a money-lending table that he was rewarded with his freedom. He inherited his old owners' banking business, established a shield factory and gifted 1,000 shields and a trireme to the state, for which he was rewarded with Athenian citizenship – a spectacular rise for a former slave.

Few shops have been discovered by archaeologists – instead tradesmen would sell their own wares on market days

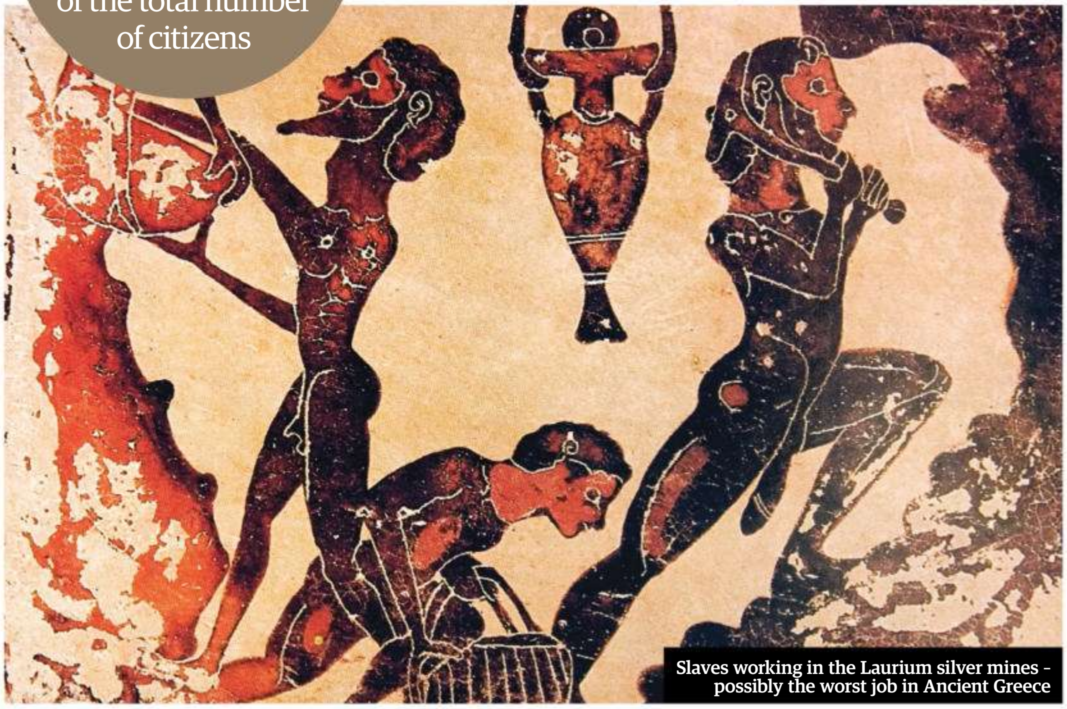
Another offshoot from Athenian prosperity was an element of social security, one which allowed poor citizens to be employed as rowers in the navy and the elderly to serve as jurors. Tradesmen were employed to build grand civic buildings like the Parthenon. Those working for the state were paid one drachma per day, no matter what the work, and were expected to work from dawn to late afternoon, no matter what the season.

The one place where no Greek ever wanted to end up working was the mines. So horrific were the conditions there that slavery was almost ubiquitous – few free men would ever stoop so low. The silver mines at Laurium and gold mines at Mount Pangaeus claimed many lives, including those of young slave children who were tasked with crawling through the smallest tunnels, often 100 metres underground.



Greek tradesmen ranged from slaves working on behalf of their masters to vastly wealthy businessmen

Each year, around 6,000 Athenians were employed by the state as jurors – around 20% of the total number of citizens



Slaves working in the Laurium silver mines – possibly the worst job in Ancient Greece

Slavery to success

Not all slaves were condemned to a life of drudgery – these men escaped the shackles and made their life a success

Aesop

Aesop was born into slavery and, although described as strikingly ugly, used his great mind to win his freedom and become an adviser to kings. He also wrote the *Fables*, a collection of folk tales with which every Greek child was familiar.

Rhodopis

Known by a nickname that means rosy-cheeked, Rhodopis was a slave-prostitute who was taken to Egypt by her owner and bought her freedom by a client who had fallen for her beauty. She continued to work as a prostitute in Egypt and stories even suggest that the pharaoh made her his queen.

Diogenes the Cynic

One of the founders of cynicism, philosopher Diogenes found himself cast into slavery after being captured by pirates and sold to a Corinthian who wanted Diogenes to tutor his children. He remained in Corinth until his death, by which time he had been freed by his master.

Phaedo of Elis

Taken prisoner by the Spartans in 402 BCE, Phaedo's beauty led to him becoming a slave-prostitute until he was bought his freedom by a friend of Socrates. Phaedo then became attached to the great philosopher and was present at his death, before returning to Elis and founding his own school.

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How democracy was born

The city-state of Athens brought the foundations and the functioning of democracy to the world in the 5th century BCE

The origins of democratic government have long been attributed to Ancient Greece, and the city-state of Athens is seen as its cradle. While Athens did indeed produce a functioning democratic process, it was not alone among the city-states in developing the elements of democracy. However, Athenian democracy proved to be the most enduring among the ancients, and its history is well documented in comparison to the others.

Even as Athens reached the height of its power and prestige, the seeds of democracy were being sown. In the early 6th century, Solon initiated government reforms that enhanced the participation of the citizenry. Around 508 BCE, Cleisthenes presided over a flourishing democracy, and in the mid-5th century BCE, Ephialtes introduced reforms that further altered and refined the operation of the Athenian government. The first known functioning democracy came into being in the city of Athens, and those other city-states that initiated democratic institutions were likely to have emulated the evolving Athenian model.

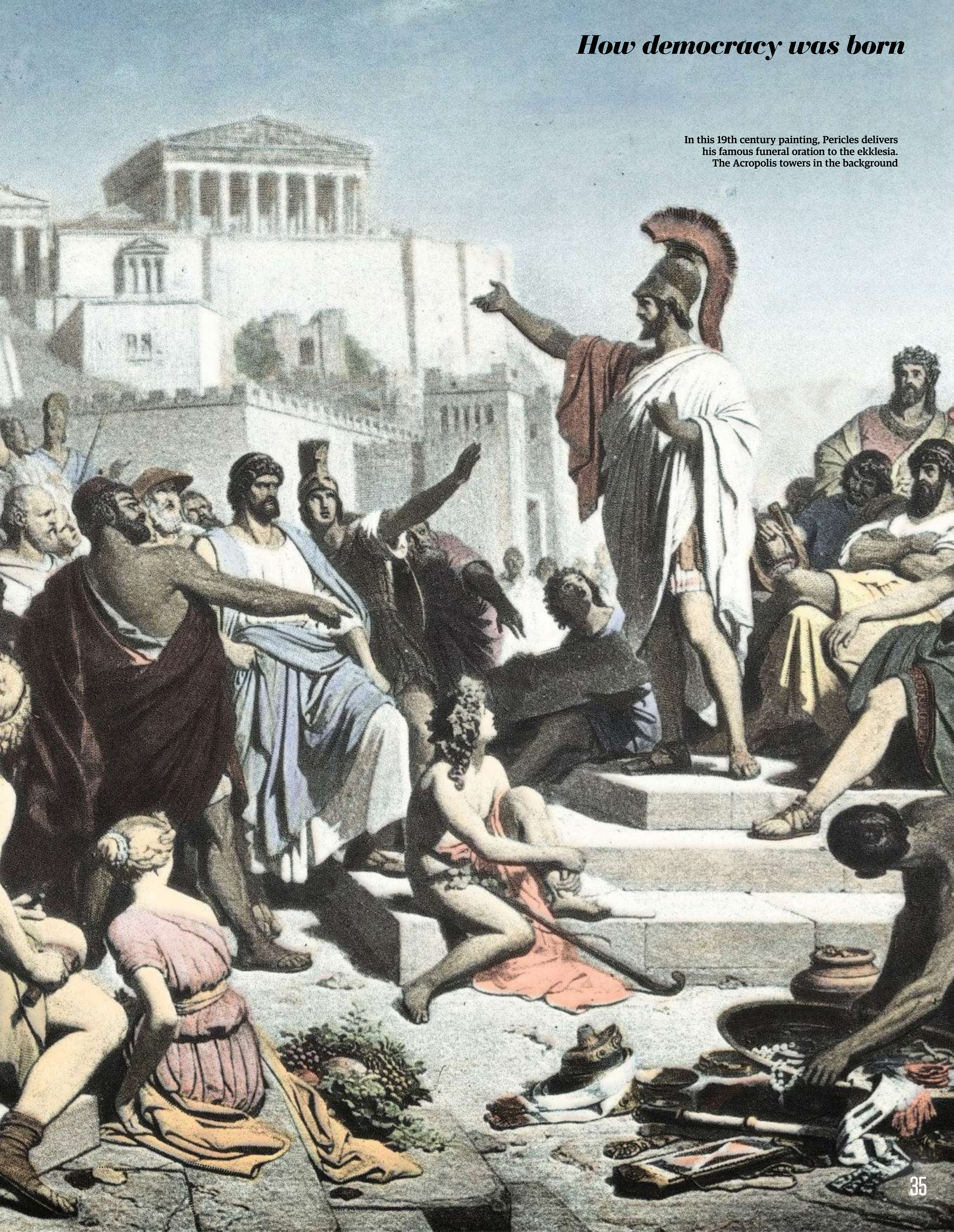
The Athenian version was a direct democracy, as those eligible to participate cast their votes directly in matters of law and justice. The process extended beyond Athens proper and into the Attic peninsula; however, all inhabitants of the city and its environs were not full participants in the democratic process. The population of greater Athens is estimated to have been around 250,000 or more during the 5th century BCE, and included slaves and non-Athenian residents.

The first test for participation in the democracy was proof of citizenship. Men who were over 18 years of age were required to attest that they were not slaves and that their parents were born in Athens. Women were excluded. Only roughly 30,000 to 50,000 residents were eligible, and scholars assert that the number never surpassed more than 30 per cent of the city-state's population.

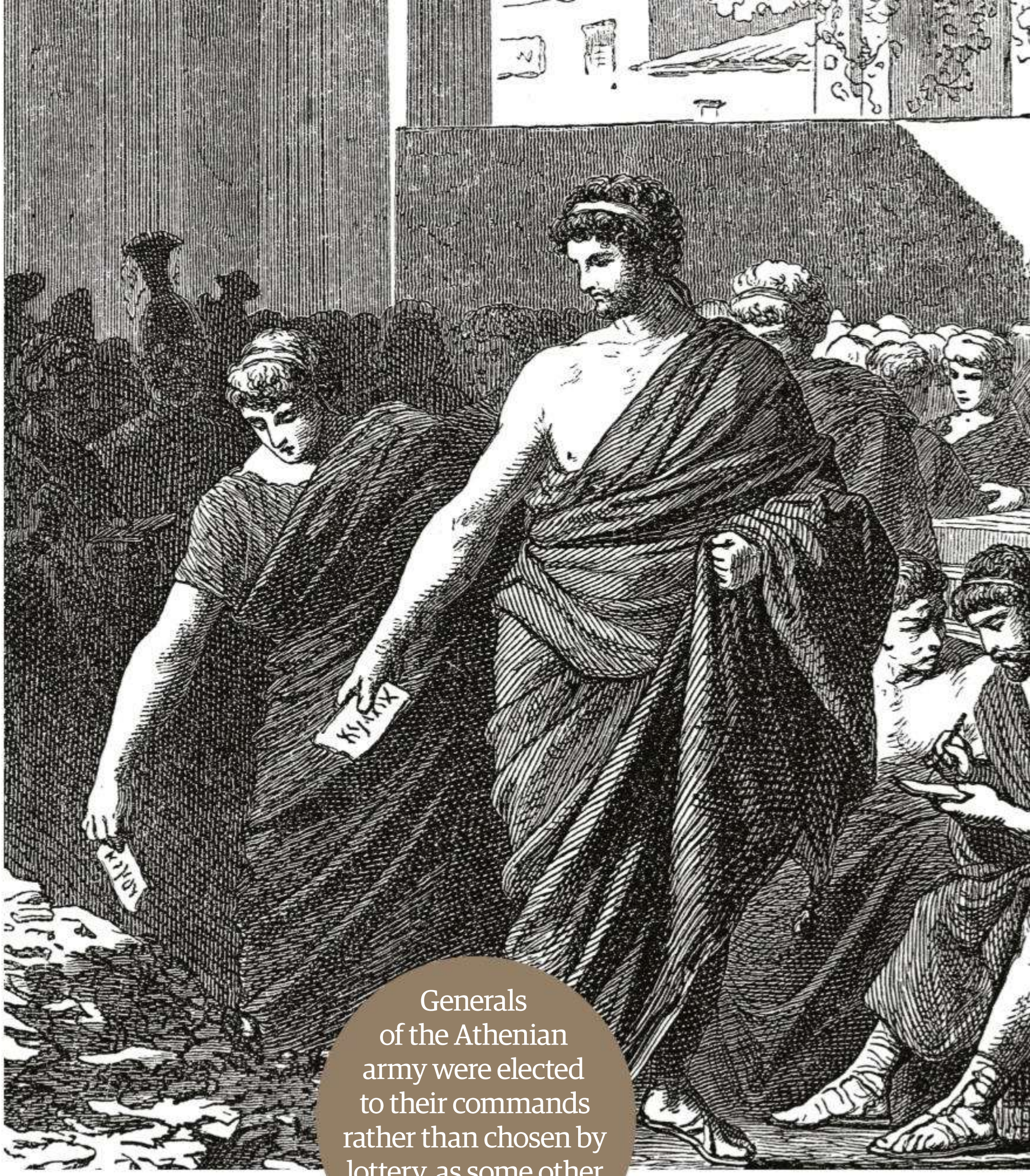
Democracy is derived from the Greek words 'demos' (people) and 'kratos' (power) and is literally translated as 'people power'

The emergence of Athenian democracy was preceded by other forms of government that existed at one time or another for at least 300 years after the founding of the city-state, or polis, around 900 BCE. The earliest government in the polis was a monarchy. A king, surrounded by a close group of noble advisors, ruled for about 100 years. Prosperity, however, brought the demise of the monarchy. Men who owned property and gained some measure of wealth through trade and commerce began to desire a voice in their own government.

These newly influential noblemen began to convene on the Areopagus, a hill near the city, and took their name from it. The Areopagus developed into a body that asserted political power and elected nine 'rulers,' known as Archons, to govern the city-state in an oligarchy. The Archons did not exercise absolute power. Their decisions were subject to the approval of the Areopagus.



In this 19th century painting, Pericles delivers his famous funeral oration to the ekklesia. The Acropolis towers in the background



By the mid-7th century, a social class structure had become well defined. The wealthy, aristocratic ruling class, including members of the Areopagus, fell into disfavour as workers and members of lower classes resented their continuing affluence, which was often maintained at the expense of those less fortunate. Greek society devolved into civil unrest, and amid the chaos assertive men came forward, promising to restore order. Often with the support of the people, these so-called 'tyrants' claimed power in a radical departure from traditional forms of accession, such as wealth or family bloodlines.

SOLON SOWS SEEDS

In 594 BCE, Solon, a statesman, poet, and archon, was elevated to rule in Athens. During difficult economic times, many Athenians had been forced to seek financial support from the aristocratic class. In exchange for loans, they were compelled to mortgage their lands and even offer themselves and family members as collateral. Often enough, such practices resulted in burdensome debt that could not be retired. Farmers and merchants found themselves enslaved to the wealthy. A financial crisis loomed, particularly as farmers lost the use of their lands, and economic collapse threatened the foundation of Athenian prosperity.

Solon set about redressing the inequity of a social structure based on wealth alone. He developed a constitution that divided Athenian society into four classes based on financial capacity and allowing members of the top three classes to serve as archons. Every Athenian was accorded the right to appeal a legal decision to a jury, reducing the power of the nine archons in such matters in favour of a larger, more equitable body. Solon then ended the custom of loans secured by an individual's freedom.

Prior to Solon's reforms, the council of the Areopagus, former archons themselves, had elected nine new archons each year. Therefore, only aristocrats were elected to the body. Solon's constitution provided that all Athenian citizens should vote for a slate of candidates for the position of archon. From among these candidates, nine individuals were then selected by lot. Under the constitution of Solon, the Areopagus was charged as the guardian of the law and a council of 400 citizens formed a more representative assembly.

Generals of the Athenian army were elected to their commands rather than chosen by lottery, as some other officials were chosen

While retaining certain aspects of the oligarchy, Solon then brought forward certain aspects of the democracy that would later come to pass in Athens.

In an era of tyrants, Solon was certainly not one of them. Although he came from an aristocratic family and was probably given the opportunity for self-aggrandisement, he chose to champion the cause of the lower classes. In one last selfless act, he required the Athenians to abide by the model constitution that had been put in place for ten years. He then left the city-state of Athens for an extended period of time.

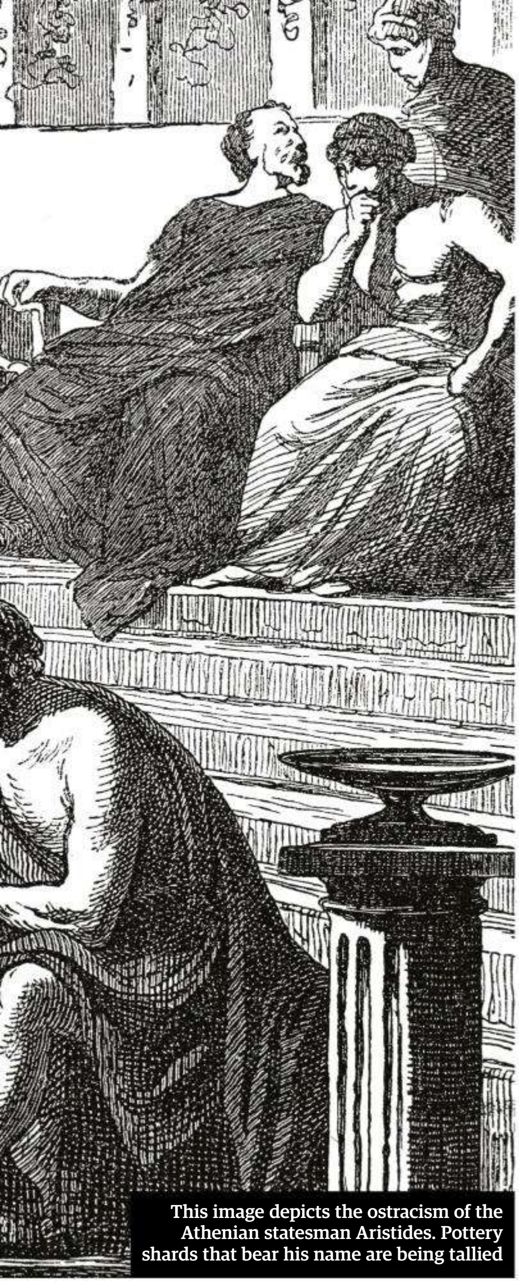
The wave of democracy that had begun to build in Athens during the early 6th century BCE was advanced somewhat ironically during the rule of the tyrant Peisistratos and his sons, Hippias and Hipparchus, which lasted about 50 years from 560 to 510 BCE. Using his army of mercenaries to support his rule, Peisistratos nevertheless maintained the goodwill of the people and even expanded the power of the governing bodies established by Solon. He continued to weaken the influence of the aristocracy and encouraged trade and agriculture while presiding over the redistribution of some lands on the Attic peninsula. The Alcmaeonidae family enlisted assistance from a Spartan army to eventually depose Hippias.

A brief struggle for supremacy in Athens ensued. Isagoras was elected an archon in 508 BCE, but his rival, Cleisthenes, a member of the Alcmaeonidae family, went directly to the people for support and gained much favour among all of the lower classes. When Isagoras summoned the Spartan army again to quash Cleisthenes, the Athenians protested heavily and then sent Isagoras and the Spartan army packing.

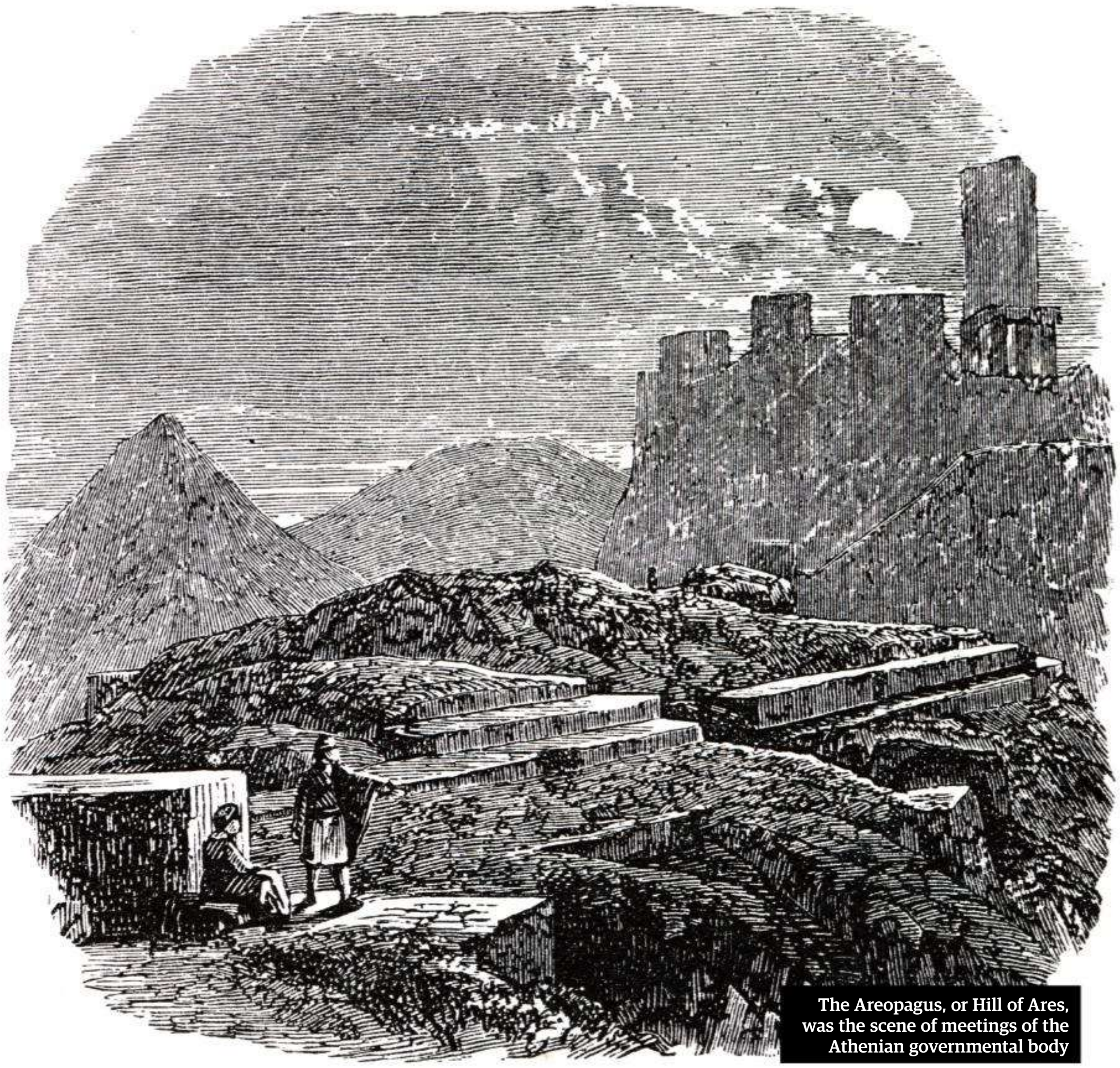
The Laws Of Draco

Around 621 BCE, Draco, the first recorded legislator of Ancient Greece, is believed to have introduced a written legal code. The written code replaced a system of oral and tribal law with one that was more uniform and intended for interpretation by a court of law. The code itself is remembered as quite harsh, and it is from the author's name that the modern word 'draconian' is derived. Little is known of Draco's life, although he is believed to have been a member of the nobility from the region of Attica. He was born around 650 BCE and died at the age of approximately 50.

Draco's code provided the first written constitution of Athens, and the people had requested that he prepare it – although they were unaware that it would be so severe. The lawgiver was once supposedly asked why the sentence of death was so prevalent in the code. He responded that those convicted of minor offenses deserved the punishment while he could think of no greater penalty for major crimes. The code also favoured nobility and the aristocratic class. For reasons that remain unclear, Draco was banished from Athens to the island of Aegina, where he spent much of his life.



This image depicts the ostracism of the Athenian statesman Aristides. Pottery shards that bear his name are being tallied



The Areopagus, or Hill of Ares, was the scene of meetings of the Athenian governmental body

CLEISTHENES AND FULL BLOOM

During the last decade of the 6th century BCE, Cleisthenes elevated Athenian democracy to prominence and became revered as its father. Although his period of rule and reform was brief, lasting only six years from 508 to 502 BCE, the impact of his measures was enormous, and it would last for two centuries.

Cleisthenes effectively eroded the influence of the aristocratic class and its distinction from the middle and working classes with the introduction of reforms that shaped a new consciousness among Athenians, a new perspective on themselves and on their relationship to the city-state. Cleisthenes made the village, known as the 'deme', the basic political unit of the new society. Rather than identifying themselves as individuals tied to families, citizens began to call themselves by names associated with their home villages. This emphasis on geographic location rather than lineage fostered a culture of 'Athenian identity' rather than a family link and helped to prevent the rise of another tyrant to challenge authority.

Each deme was administered by a demarch, whose responsibilities were similar to a town mayor and included placing individuals in three groups or 'thirds,' including verified males who were over 18 and therefore citizens, those citizens selected to serve on the council, and those that were eligible for participation in the assembly. To further engage every Athenian citizen in the process of government, Cleisthenes reorganised the social structure further, effectively abolishing an old system of tribes and replacing it with a new framework. Each of the thirds was assigned to one of ten new tribes. Each tribe contained three thirds, one from the city, one from the coastal area, and one from the interior of the greater city-state. In turn, each tribe sent 50 citizens annually to serve on a new council of 500, increased in number from 400 since the time of Solon.

The new structure brought together citizens from all areas of Athens. The tribes became tremendously influential in the democratic process, while the citizenry was thoroughly engaged - all the way to the local level. Cleisthenes possessed the forethought to eliminate the possibility of regional or provincial politics from undermining the process with the passage of time. He asserted that once a citizen was registered in a particular deme, he then remained with that deme for the purposes of governmental participation regardless of whether he relocated to another area of the city-state of Athens.

To add an air of legitimacy and historical context to the new social and political apparatus, Cleisthenes named the ten new tribes after one of the city-state's heroes of antiquity. These were supposedly handed down by Apollo, the sun god, through the oracle of Delphi. The ten heroes included Pandion, Oeneus, Leos, Cecrops, Hippothoon, Erechtheus, Antiochus, Acamas, Aegeus, and Ajax. These heroes were further immortalised and revered with the placement of their statues in the agora of Athens, near the area where new laws and proclamations were publicly placed for the people to view.

> Athenian women were restricted in movement in public places and often segregated from the male population

STRUCTURE AND STRENGTH

Athenian democracy is remembered historically as a sometimes raucous, litigious, and contentious institution in its practical application. Still, it fundamentally revolutionised the role of government in the lives of the people and their own ability to influence the course of events. Although full participation was denied to many residents of Athens, the emergence of the democratic process was nevertheless one of the most profound events in the history of the Western world. The reformed structure introduced by Cleisthenes around 507 BCE retained institutions whose roots lay with Solon nearly a century earlier.

Cleisthenes called his system of government demokratia, or 'rule by the people'. Its basic structure included three pillars that served to maintain equity, dispense justice, and write and interpret laws.

The assembly, or ekklesia, was the central governing authority in Athens. In its early period the ekklesia met only ten times per year. However, that number was later expanded to 40 times, while called meetings might also take place. The meetings were open to any citizen of Athens and were held in a theatre on a hillside called Pnyx just west of the great Athenian Acropolis. The ekklesia undertook the writing of new laws and the revision of those already in force. It deliberated questions of foreign policy, including whether or not to go to war, and it held public officials accountable for their conduct.

Adult male citizens considered it their responsibility to attend assembly meetings, but duties with the armed forces, the harvest, or other activities usually limited the gatherings to about 5,000 people. At times attendance was compulsory. Slaves would extend a rope stained in red across the agora to herd citizens into an ekklesia meeting. Those whose clothing bore telltale crimson marks were then fined. By the late 5th century BCE attendees to the ekklesia were paid for their time. Only the first 6,000 to arrive received compensation, and the red rope was still in use – as a barrier to the late arrivals.

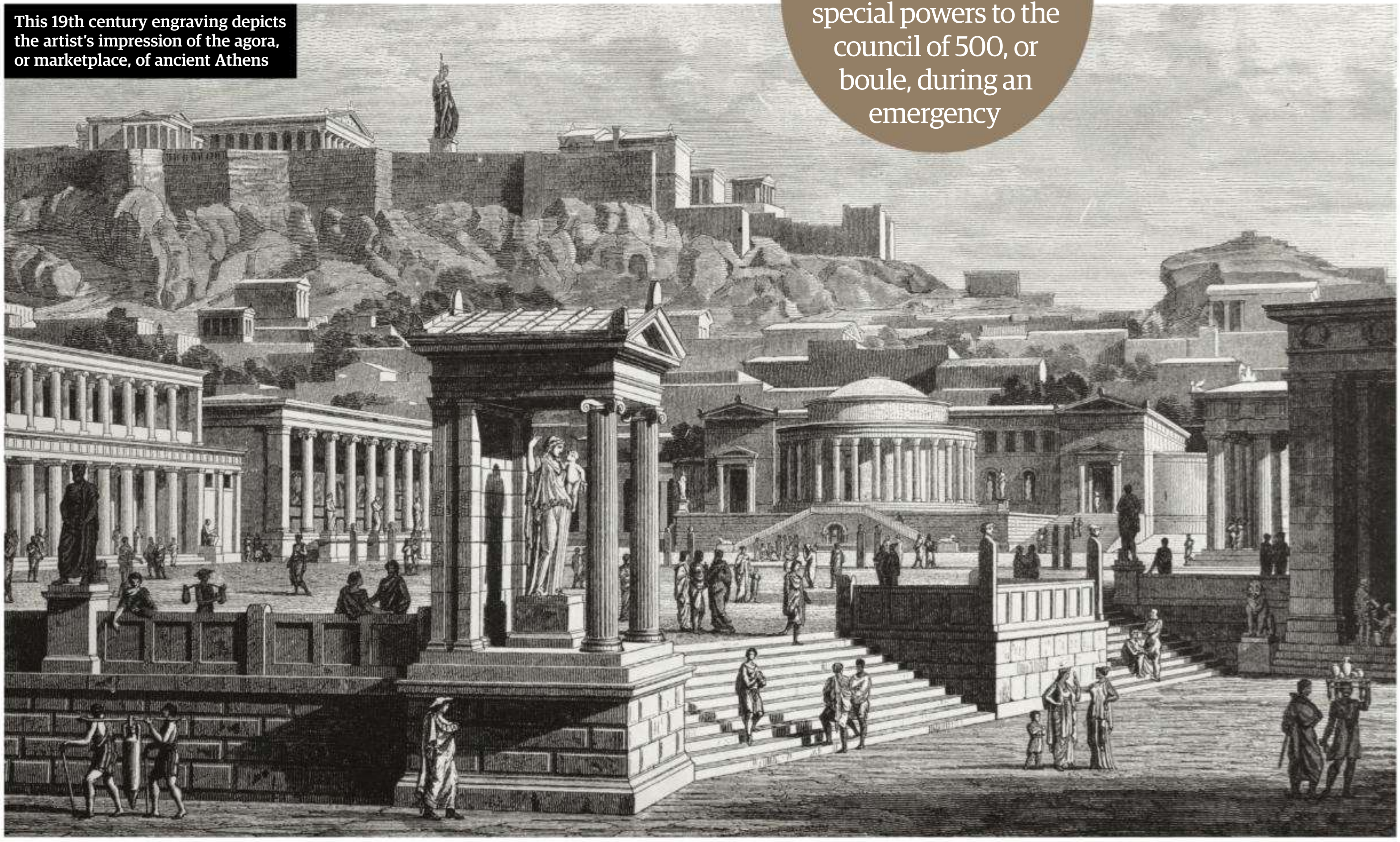
> "The authority of the boule was extensive, ranging from the disposition of government property to livestock"

The council of 500 convened under Cleisthenes was called the 'boule'. Those 50 men chosen from the ten tribes to comprise the council served terms of one year. The authority of the boule was extensive, ranging from the disposition of government property from ships to livestock and receiving emissaries from other city-states. The boule met every day, and since it was responsible for much of the routine conduct of government-related business in Athens probably exerted the most significant influence on the lives of the people. The primary function of the boule was to determine those matters of state that were worthy of presentation before the ekklesia. Therefore, the boule exerted tremendous influence in the political life of the city-state and the democratic process.

> The ekklesia, or assembly, retained the authority to grant special powers to the council of 500, or boule, during an emergency

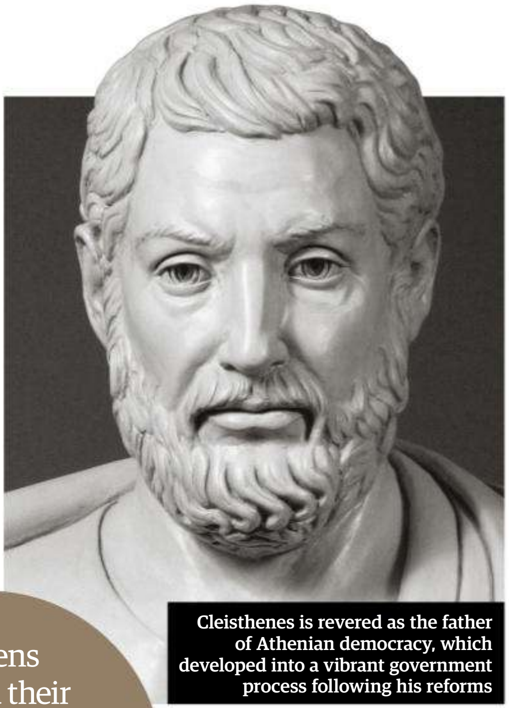
Interestingly, those who would occupy positions within the boule were determined by lot rather than ballot. The reason was simple. An individual chosen through a drawing could attribute his selection to pure luck. An election, however, was subject to outside influences such as bribery or back room dealing. Elections might also perpetuate a permanently entitled class of officials within the boule over time and promote the temptation for personal gain. Again, the lottery approach would safeguard against such a situation. A tantalising question remains, though, as historians have noted with some chagrin that certain citizens and members of their families seemed to serve with much greater regularity than others. Were these few individuals just lucky?

An integral component of Athenian democracy, the court



This 19th century engraving depicts the artist's impression of the agora, or marketplace, of ancient Athens

The ruins of the Pnyx, the meeting place of the ancient ekklesia, lie empty. The speaker's platform remains in the centre


Cleisthenes is revered as the father of Athenian democracy, which developed into a vibrant government process following his reforms

system, or 'dikasteria', was a functional marvel. Each day a pool of citizens, males over 30 years old, assembled. From their number, 500 were chosen to serve as jurors. The people brought cases directly to court. There was no police force in the city-state to arrest and charge an individual; therefore, the jury held tremendous power in the discharge of cases that other citizens presented during arguments for and against any accused party.

Public cases were argued first by the prosecutor and then by the defendant. Each was allowed a single speech of three hours' duration, and each was timed with a water clock. If a case was to be heard in private, the time for arguments was significantly diminished. A case was forbidden to last longer than a single day, and jurors were routinely vocal, loudly expressing their support or doubt of a certain point. In either case, when both sides had presented their points of view, there was minimal discussion among the jurors – no time allotted for formal deliberations – and the vote on guilt or innocence was taken.

There were no prohibitions as to what kinds of cases could be brought before an Athenian jury, which sometimes allowed individuals to drag enemies into the public arena for embarrassment or vengeance. Jurors were required to interpret the motive of the accuser or plaintiff as well as the guilt or innocence of the defendant. Beginning around 462 BCE, jurors began receiving pay for their services with the expectation that compensation made the job an endeavour in which every citizen might participate, not just the aristocratic, wealthy, or those who could afford to lose wages from their regular vocation.

At approximately the same time, Ephialtes began a successful effort to further reduce the influence of the Areopagus. He prosecuted members of the body for poor administration and successfully divided much of its remaining power between the ekklesia, the boule, and the dikasteria. When Ephialtes was finished, the Areopagus was no longer the guardian of the constitution, but merely a court in itself that adjudicated cases involving murder and religion.

> Citizens blamed their democratic government for the disastrous expedition against Syracuse in 413 BCE

TWILIGHT OF DEMOCRACY

Ephialtes was assassinated in 461 BCE, allowing his rival Pericles to consolidate power. While the democracy continued to function, the influence of Pericles became so great that he was deemed the "first citizen of Athens." Controversy surrounds the rule of Pericles. Some historians believe he advanced democracy through measures that benefitted the lower classes, while others assert that his personal power and sway over the government contributed to its decline.

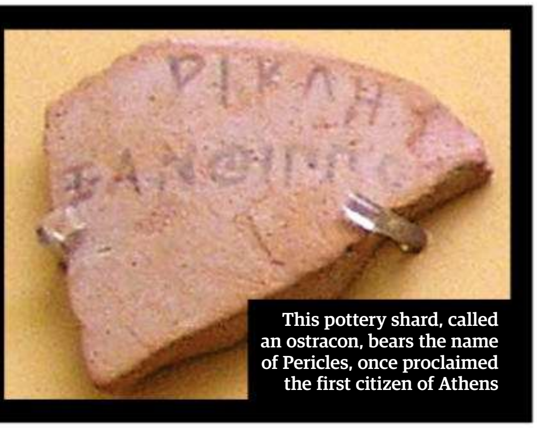
Democratic ideals in Athens endured despite challenges during the years of the Peloponnesian War, including the short-lived return of an oligarchy in 411 BCE. Defeat at the hands of the Spartans in 404 BCE brought the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, a puppet government that lasted only a year before the return of democracy. In 338 BCE, however, the irresistible tide of the Macedonian army, with King Philip II at its head, conquered most of Greece, ending the noble experiment in Athenian democracy.

Despite its relatively short period of existence in Athens, the concepts of democracy survived to later influence the Roman Empire and in turn to shape modern democratic governments.

Through ostracism

The ekklesia, or assembly, a powerful body of the Athenian democracy, retained one peculiar power – that of ostracism. An innovation of Cleisthenes probably intended to banish any individual who posed a threat to the Athenian democracy, ostracism provided for the expulsion of that individual following a vote of the ekklesia. Annually the assembly voted whether or not to conduct an ostracism. If the vote was in favour, the process took place at another meeting held within a few months of the first. Citizens voted by scratching the name of a person that they wanted banished on a shard of pottery called an 'ostraka.' At least 6,000 citizens were required to vote in order for these clay ballots to be tallied.

The individual that got the highest number of votes was required to leave Athens for ten years; however, he did not forfeit his property or lose his rights as an Athenian citizen. Ostracism may have actually been looked upon as an honour. At times an individual became so powerful that he posed a threat to democracy itself. Among those who were ostracised during their lifetime were Themistocles, hero of the wars with Persia, Thucydides, politician and historian, and Alcibiades, statesman, orator, and military commander.


This pottery shard, called an ostracon, bears the name of Pericles, once proclaimed the first citizen of Athens

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ART & CULTURE

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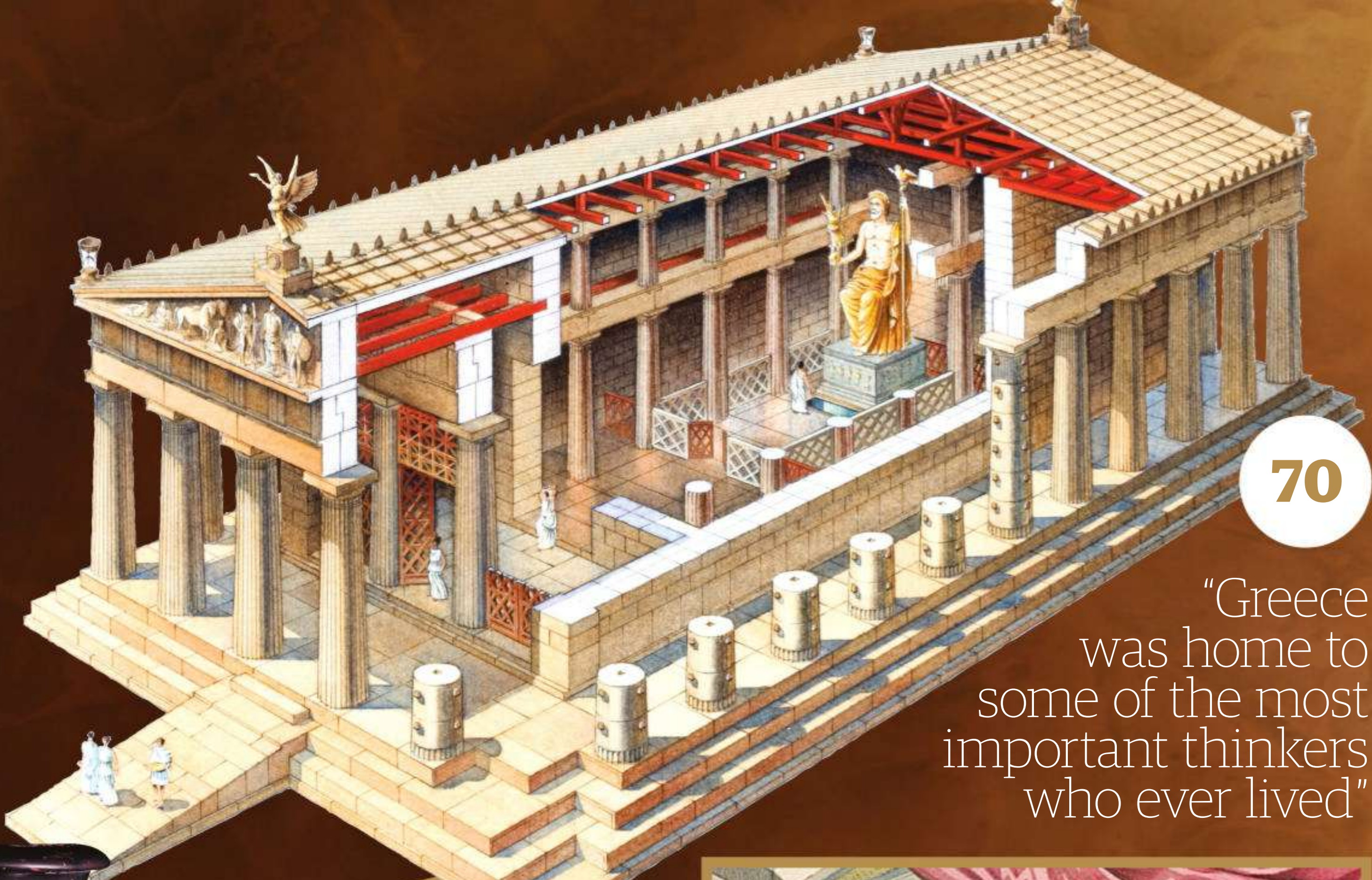

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> “Greece was home to some of the most important thinkers who ever lived”

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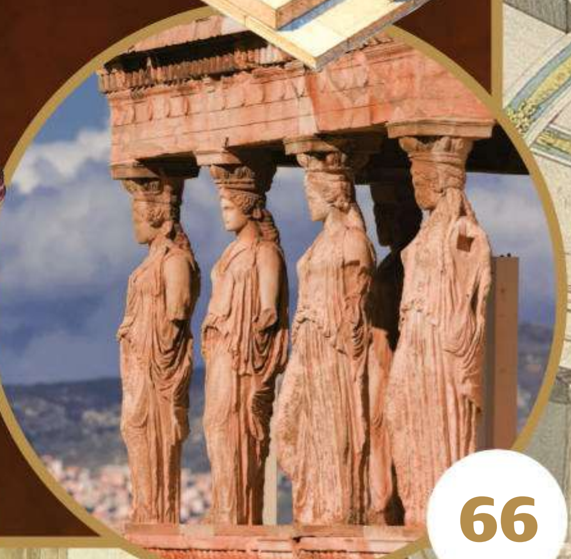

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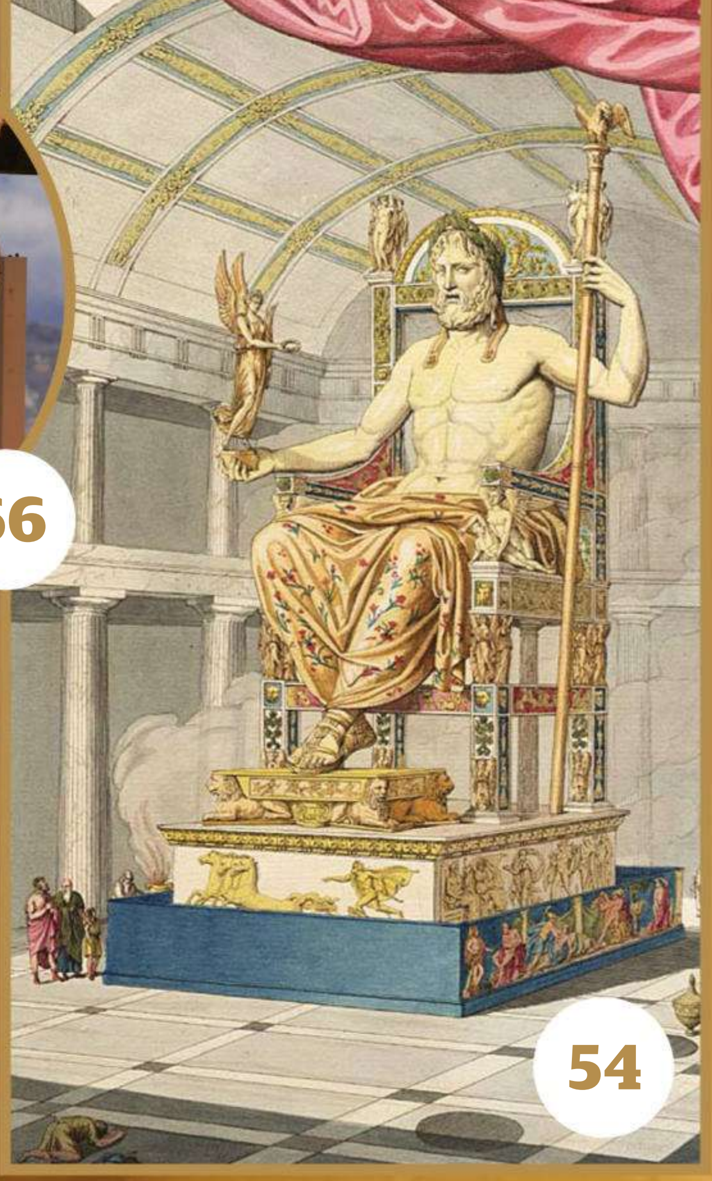

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The greatest minds of Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece was home to some of the most important thinkers and philosophers who ever lived

From the 6th century BCE to the height of the Roman Empire and beyond, there was an extraordinary proliferation of thinkers and schools attempting to understand the world. Largely approaching subjects in a non-religious way, Greek philosophers began to emphasise reason and rational thought, meticulously picking away at problems and theories across a vast array of subjects including the sciences, mathematics, cosmology, literature, art, music, politics and medicine.

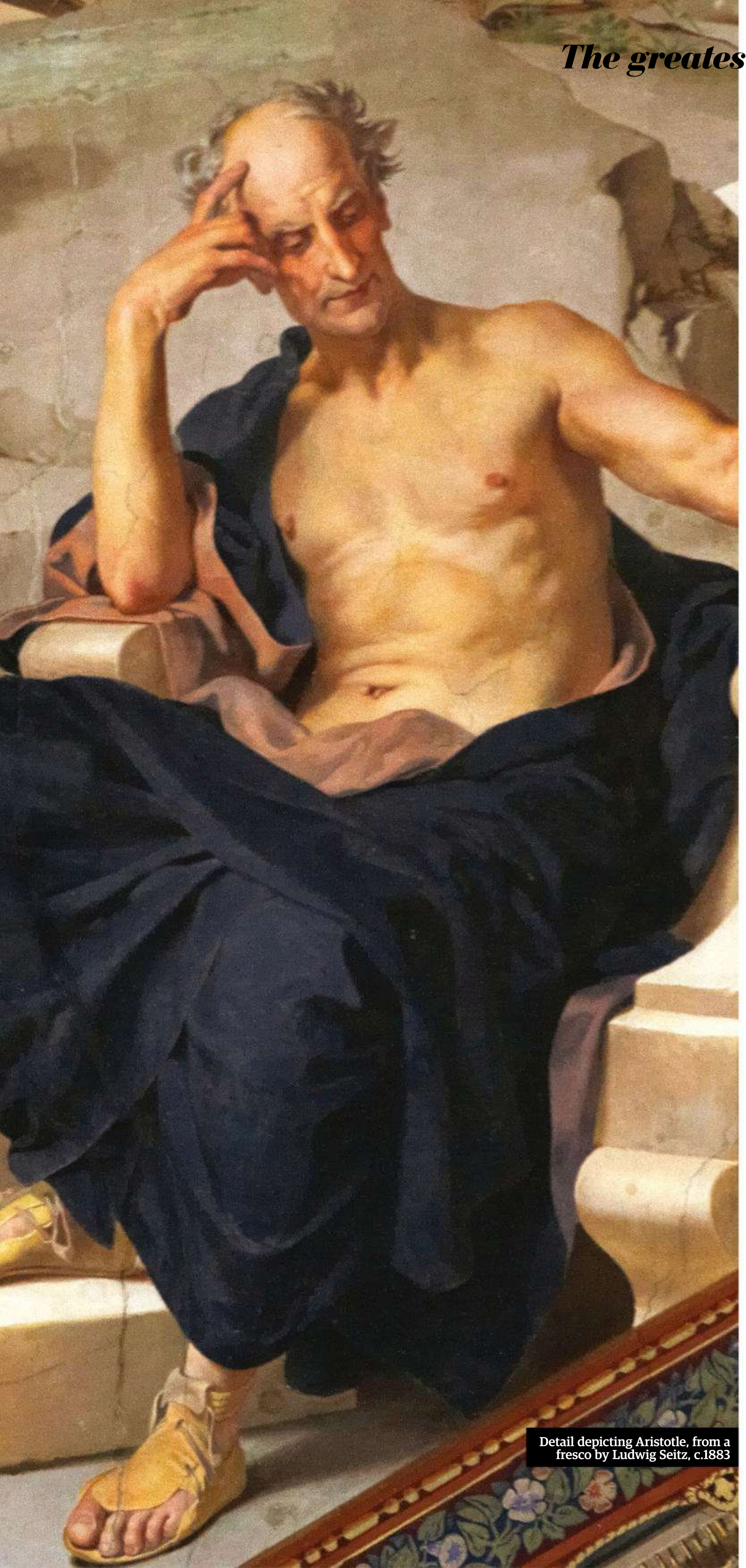
The work of the Ancient Greeks is still taught and studied today, and where nothing remains of a particular philosopher's own writing (Socrates', for example), we often have at least the word of some of their contemporaries and successors to indicate the thrust of their enquiries.

To modern eyes, some of their work seems surprisingly sophisticated: Democritus suggested the existence of atoms; Thales and Pythagoras discovered important formulae in geometry; and Aristotle's studies of the ecology of the island of Lesbos were a formative influence on Charles Darwin, and on the study of natural history in general.

In short, the Ancient Greek philosophers opened a window onto ways of thinking that underpin the entire Western intellectual tradition. Some of them even lost their lives in pursuit of the truth: finding that their ideas were dangerously at odds with those of the political and religious systems they lived under. But their work was remembered and passed down through the ages.

The following are ten of the most famous 'great minds' of all time.

ΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΗΣ



Detail depicting Aristotle, from a fresco by Ludwig Seitz, c.1883

Aristotle

Dates 384-322 BCE
Birthplace Stagira, Macedonia
Major achievements and concepts Logic, Syllogism, founding of Lyceum school

Aristotle was perhaps the greatest of all the Classical Greek philosophers. His work encompassed the sciences, metaphysics, ethics, art, literature, music, politics, linguistics and logic. He took the work of Plato and ran with it in unexpected directions: remaining deeply respectful of Plato even when he disagreed with him. He ended up with the first truly comprehensive system of Western philosophy.

He moved in exalted circles: he was the son of a royal physician, so would have spent time in the Macedonian palace during his early years. He was orphaned young, however, and joined Plato's Academy when he was 17, remaining there for 20 years. He left when Plato died and Plato's nephew Speusippus took over the running of the Academy, to Aristotle's apparent dissatisfaction. He initially travelled to Asia Minor, and then to Lesbos where he undertook detailed studies of the island's flora and fauna. By 343 BCE he was acting as tutor to Alexander the Great, at the invitation of Philip II of Macedonia. He encouraged Alexander in his conquest of the East, and went on to teach two further kings in Ptolemy and Cassander. But after a decade or so he was back in Athens, establishing his own school, the Lyceum. He spent the next 12 years there, both teaching and composing his most famous and important works. He's known to have written more than 200 treatises, although only 31 survive today.

Aristotle was the first Greek philosopher to make studying the works of his predecessors and contemporaries a central part of his own thinking. Only by doing so, he reasoned, could he hope to avoid their mistakes and progress into new intellectual territory. As a scientist, he was an advocate of adhering to 'first principles': being able to apply the basic principles of a subject to examination and explanation of the more complex. He defined philosophy itself as the search for explanations of natural events that inspire wonder, but suggested that a simple answer to a 'why' question simply wasn't enough without understanding all of the constituent parts building up to that conclusion. One of the most famous examples of a 'valid' argument is his syllogism: all men are mortal; I am a man; therefore I am mortal. The premises that form the structure of his argument are true, meaning that his conclusion ought to be equally true.

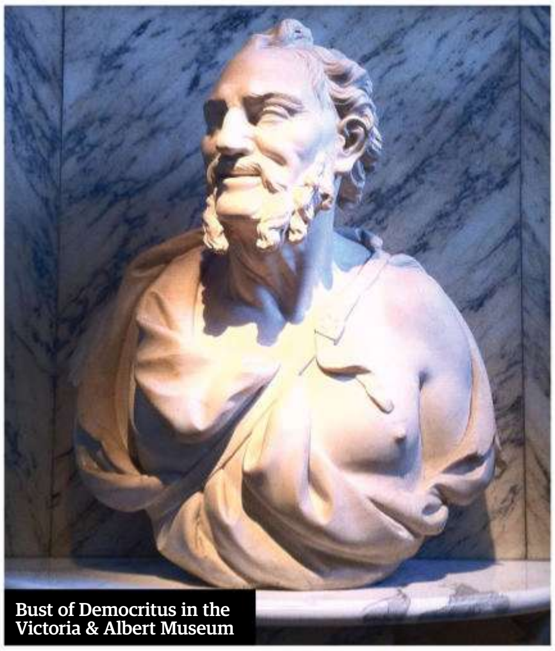
After the death of Alexander, anti-Macedonian sentiment in Athens became rife, and Aristotle was forced to flee to his family estate on the Greek island of Euboea. He died shortly afterwards, in 322 BCE, from a digestive illness. If his death was unremarkable, however, his legacy is tremendous. In his 62 years he radically transformed the understanding of every subject he studied.

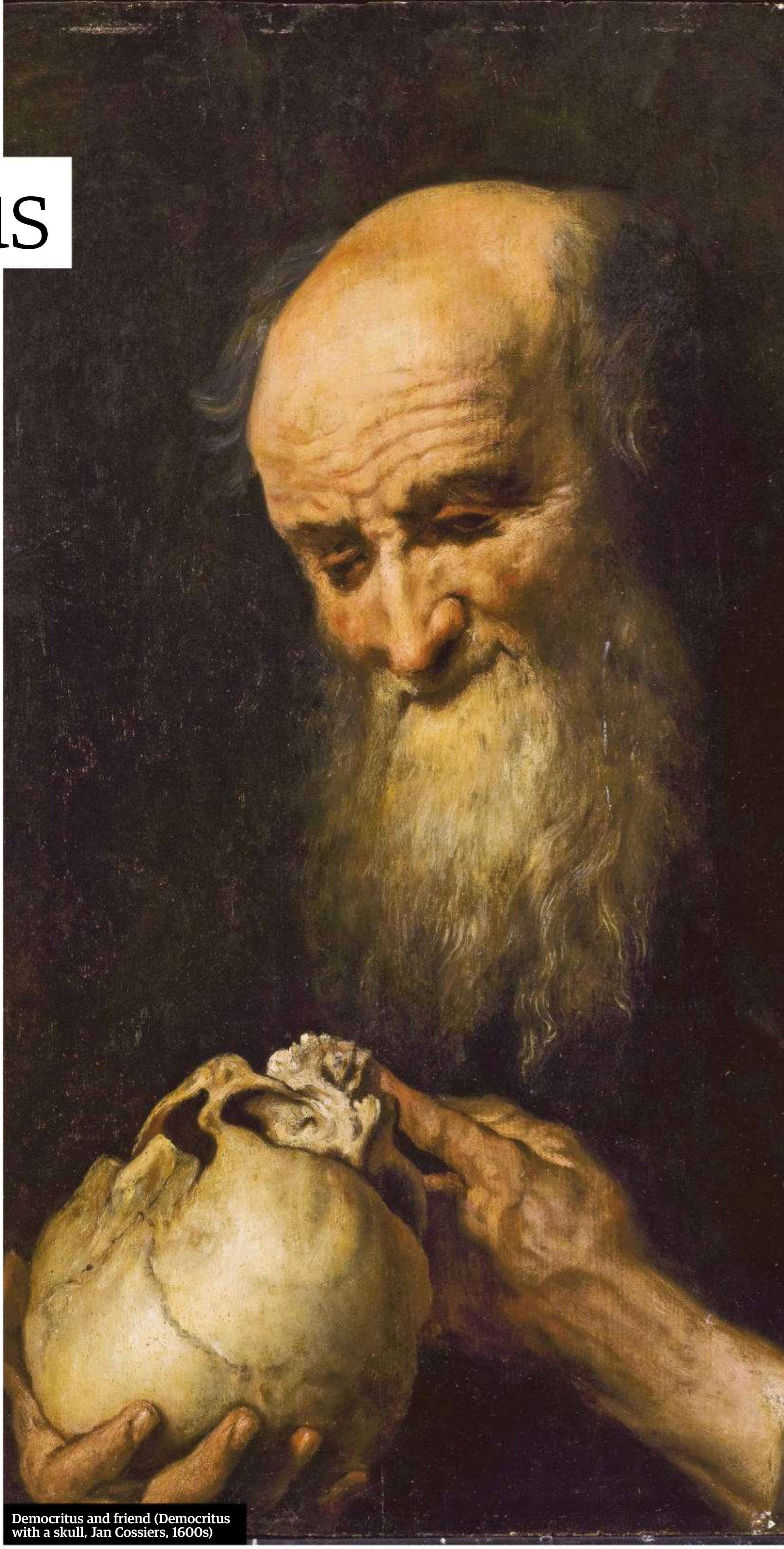
Democritus

Dates c.460-370 BCE
Birthplace Thrace
Major achievements and concepts Atomism, Aetiology (causality)

Along with Aristotle and Leucippus, Democritus is credited with the theory of Atomism: the notion that everything in nature is made up of indivisible elements, or 'atoms'. Parmenides had argued that nothing in nature ever changes and that it's only our perception that makes change appear to happen. Heraclitus had argued the opposite: that everything changes all the time. Democritus' breakthrough was to reconcile the two ideas, suggesting that the universe has two ingredients: non-being and being. Atoms, according to this theory, are pieces of 'being', which move through the 'non-being' of empty space. Crucially the Atomists attempted to explain the universe without questioning its actual purpose: they asked how things happened, rather than what they happened for.

Born sometime between 460 and 490 BCE, Democritus is known to have been the author of at least 70 works across a range of subjects, including ethics, physics, mathematics and poetry and fine art. Born into great wealth, he was able to travel far and wide and to acquire a substantial library. He lived to a ripe old age too, but none of his works survive and he seems to have remained obscure among his contemporaries in his own time: once claiming that he'd been to Athens and "no one knew me" (others suggest he was acquainted with Hippocrates and Socrates, but Plato never once mentions him). Nevertheless, he's become known as the 'Laughing Philosopher', thanks to his belief that a sunny disposition should be everyone's ultimate goal in life.


Bust of Democritus in the Victoria & Albert Museum


Democritus and friend (Democritus with a skull, Jan Cossiers, 1600s)

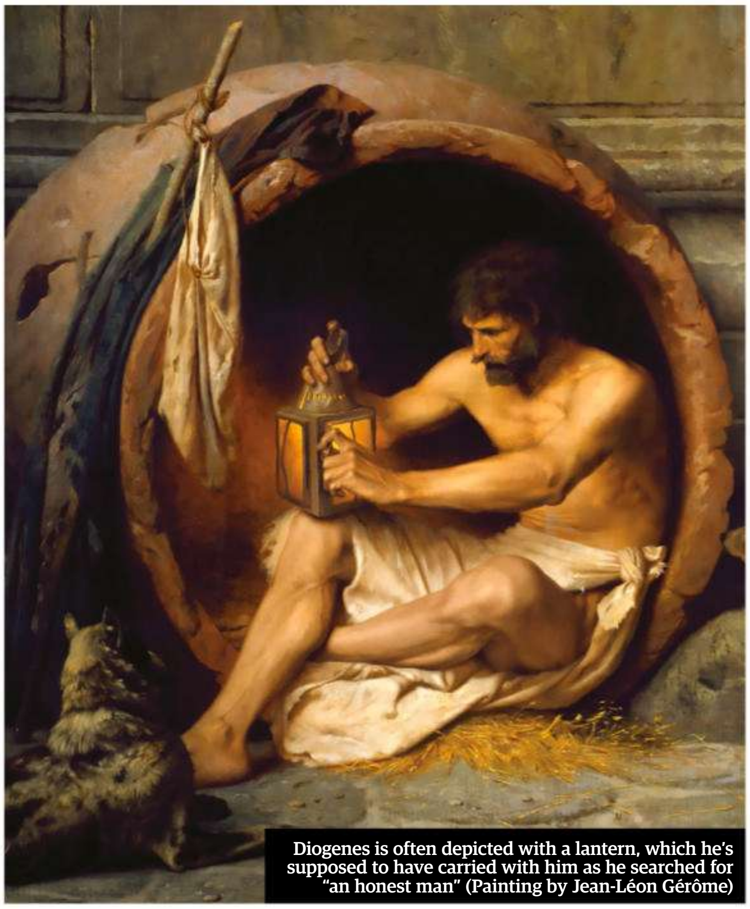
Diogenes

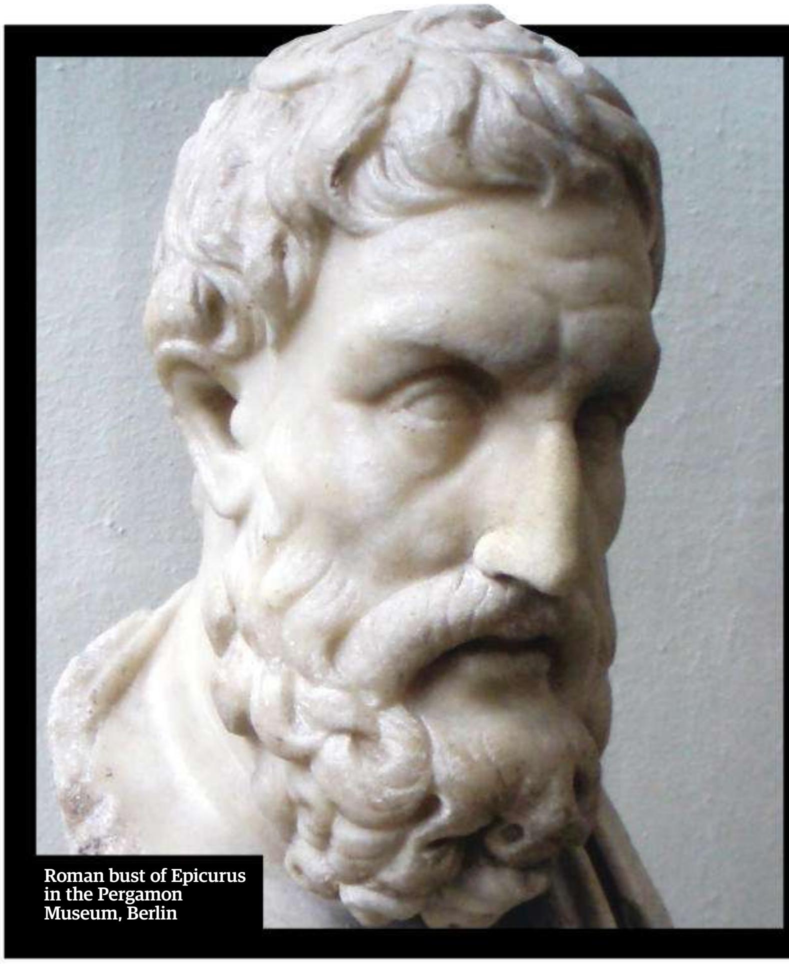
Dates c.412-323 BCE **Birthplace** Sinope
Major achievements and concepts Cynicism, Cosmopolitanism

Diogenes the Cynic believed that the trappings of civilisation were an impediment to happiness. His answer to the problem was that true morality meant a return to the simplicity of nature. Plato called him "Socrates gone mad".

He was born in Sinope sometime around 412 BCE and was the son of a wealthy banker. He himself seemed set to follow his father into finance, but he fell foul of the law thanks to a failed counterfeiting scheme, and was stripped of his citizenship and exiled from Sinope. His life left in tatters, he decided to head for Athens to challenge the political system at its very core.

As a man without a city-state, he claimed to be "a citizen of the world", and this is the first apparent use of the word 'cosmopolitan', referring to a single shared community of humanity. Philanthropy – concern for others – was also fundamental to his philosophy. He eschewed material possessions (other than the very basic possessions like a cloak for modesty and protection from the elements), and lived in a barrel on the street, begging, and performing his bodily functions in public. He loudly denounced civilised life, rejecting education and culture as being in the way of perfect simplicity. Alexander the Great is once supposed to have offered to help him, only for Diogenes to complain that he was blocking his light. But he wasn't just a vulgar clown: he put his wit to use both as a teacher rallying others to his wonky cause, and as the author of several written works, none of which prevailed as careers. He died around 323 BCE, leaving instructions that his body should just be thrown outside the city walls to feed the wild animals.


Diogenes is often depicted with a lantern, which he's supposed to have carried with him as he searched for "an honest man" (Painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme)


Roman bust of Epicurus in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin

Epicurus

Dates 341-270 BCE **Birthplace** Samos
Major achievements and concepts Epicureanism, Reciprocity, foundation of Athens school the Garden

Eschewing mystical notions of gods and the supernatural, Epicurus taught that death is the end of both the body and the soul, and that fulfilment therefore came from living a happy life while it lasted. He also insisted that gods do not punish or reward people; that the universe is infinite and was created by chance; and that – following the thinking of Democritus – everything in the universe is made up of infinitesimal atoms moving through space.

He gives his name to the popular modern notion of Epicureanism, which is something akin to being a gourmet and a hedonist; he even ordained in his will that annual feasts should be held in his memory. This is, however, something of a corruption and misunderstanding of the teachings he shared at his Athens-based school, the Garden. Epicurus did indeed believe that personal pleasure was the greatest good: his desire to minimise harm and maximise pleasure was dubbed the Ethic of Reciprocity. But his specific idea of pleasure was modest living, study, seclusion and keeping one's desires in check. This was, in his view, the path to tranquillity, with freedom from fear and pain the ultimate goal.

Given the latter, he suffered from agonising kidney stones, but despite the discomfort, he insisted in a letter to his friend Idomeneus that the cheerfulness of his mind counterbalanced all his afflictions. He finally died from the complaint in 270 BCE at the age of 72.

Pythagoras

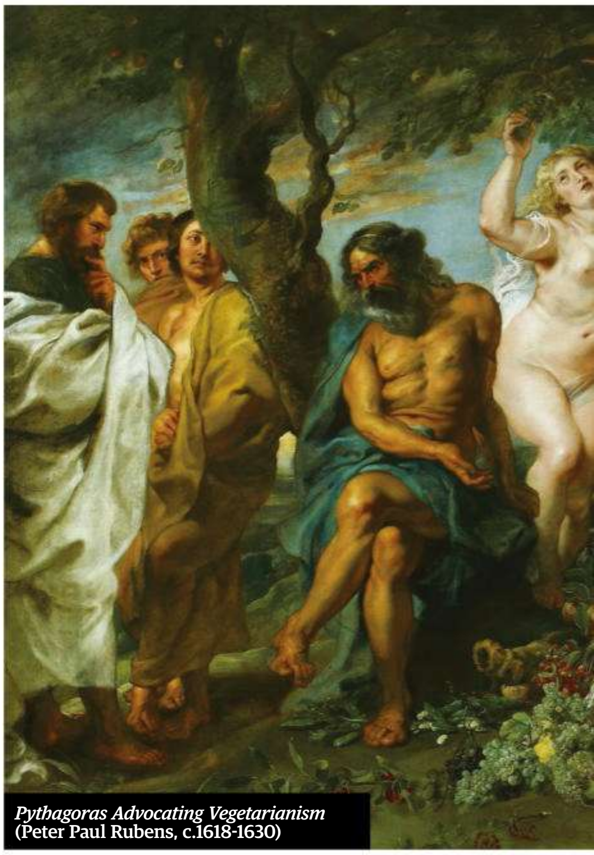
Dates c.560-495 BCE **Birthplace** Samos
Major achievements and concepts Pythagorean theorem, Vegetarianism, Metempsychosis (transmigration of soul)

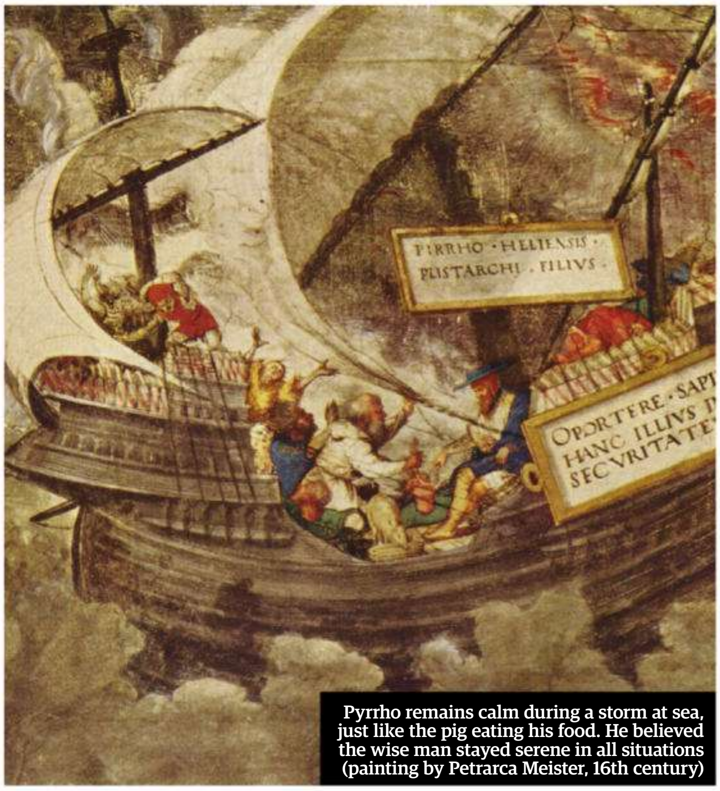
Two-and-a-half thousand years after his death, Pythagoras' name can still be regularly heard in mathematics classrooms across the world. His is the famous formula regarding right-angled triangles: that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. It's a fundamental of geometry, and if Pythagoras had given the world nothing else, he would still be remembered. But there was far more to him than mathematical theorems.

Pythagoras was born around 560 BCE on the Greek island of Samos. His father was a wealthy jewel merchant. He's thought to have been widely educated in Greece, Egypt and the Orient, and may have met Thales, known for his own inscribed angle theorem. Like Thales, Pythagoras and his followers came to the conclusion that there was one single, underlying, unifying element at the base of all things. Where Thales thought it was water, for the Pythagoreans the universal root of everything was numbers. The one thing that every single thing had in common was that everything could be counted. His thinking had a profound influence on Plato in later years.

Aside from mathematics, Pythagoras' work encompassed music, astronomy and medicine. He founded his own philosophical school at the age of about 40 in the Greek colony of Croton (now Crotone) in southern Italy. Its work was secretive, but it seems reasonable to assume that all of the above were studied, along with political and religious ideas, such as the transmigration of souls (or reincarnation). One story has Pythagoras claiming that he fought in the Trojan War in a previous life; and that he recognised the soul of an old friend within a dog. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the latter, his followers were required to adopt a strict vegetarian diet, but, bizarrely, were forbidden from eating beans. One anecdote says Pythagoras believed farting damaged people's souls. Others have suggested that beans were commonly used as a voting system (black for no, white for yes), and that in banning the bean Pythagoras was therefore advocating abstention from politics. Whatever the reason, there's no doubt that the Pythagoreans' diet was part of a rigorous regime around spiritual and physical wellbeing, with reports that music and gymnastics formed important parts of his order's daily routine.

Internal division, civil unrest and arguments with the neighbouring colony of Sybaris eventually drove the Pythagoreans out of Croton, and they then settled instead in what's now Metaponto, in Basilicata. Pythagoras, according to most sources, remained there for the rest of his life. He died around 500 BCE, his demise varyingly attributed to an angry mob who disliked the cult he'd built up around himself; being caught in the conflict between the Syracusans and Agrigentum; or suicide by starvation.


Pythagoras Advocating Vegetarianism
(Peter Paul Rubens, c.1618-1630)



Pyrrho remains calm during a storm at sea, just like the pig eating his food. He believed the wise man stayed serene in all situations (painting by Petrarca Meister, 16th century)

Pyrrho

Dates c.360-270 BCE **Birthplace** Elis
Major achievements and concepts Skepticism

Pyrrho, born around 360 BCE, has become known as the father of Greek Skepticism. He believed that nothing could be known about the nature of the universe, because our senses cannot be relied upon to be accurate or trustworthy. Suspending judgements on all subjects was therefore, for Pyrrho, the path to tranquillity. While his contemporaries argued and debated, he remained calm and serene: confident that all theses can be refuted meaning none are important.

He was born in Elis, on the Ionian Sea, and began his working life as a painter before becoming attracted to the world of philosophy through the works of Democritus. He travelled as far as India and Persia in the cortège of Alexander the Great, and his exposure to the philosophies of the East honed his thinking – which is not unlike some of the tenets of Buddhism – to the extent that he was revered as a great mind on his return to Greece.

Despite his fame, however, he continued to live simply and in solitude, and appears to have written nothing. He remained in Elis for the rest of his long, quiet life, and died in unremarked circumstances at the age of about 90. What we know of his thinking was recorded later in the works of Sextus Empiricus, and his ideas returned to prominence a century or so later when Aenesidemus broke away from Platonism and founded his own school of 'Pyrrhonism'.

Plato

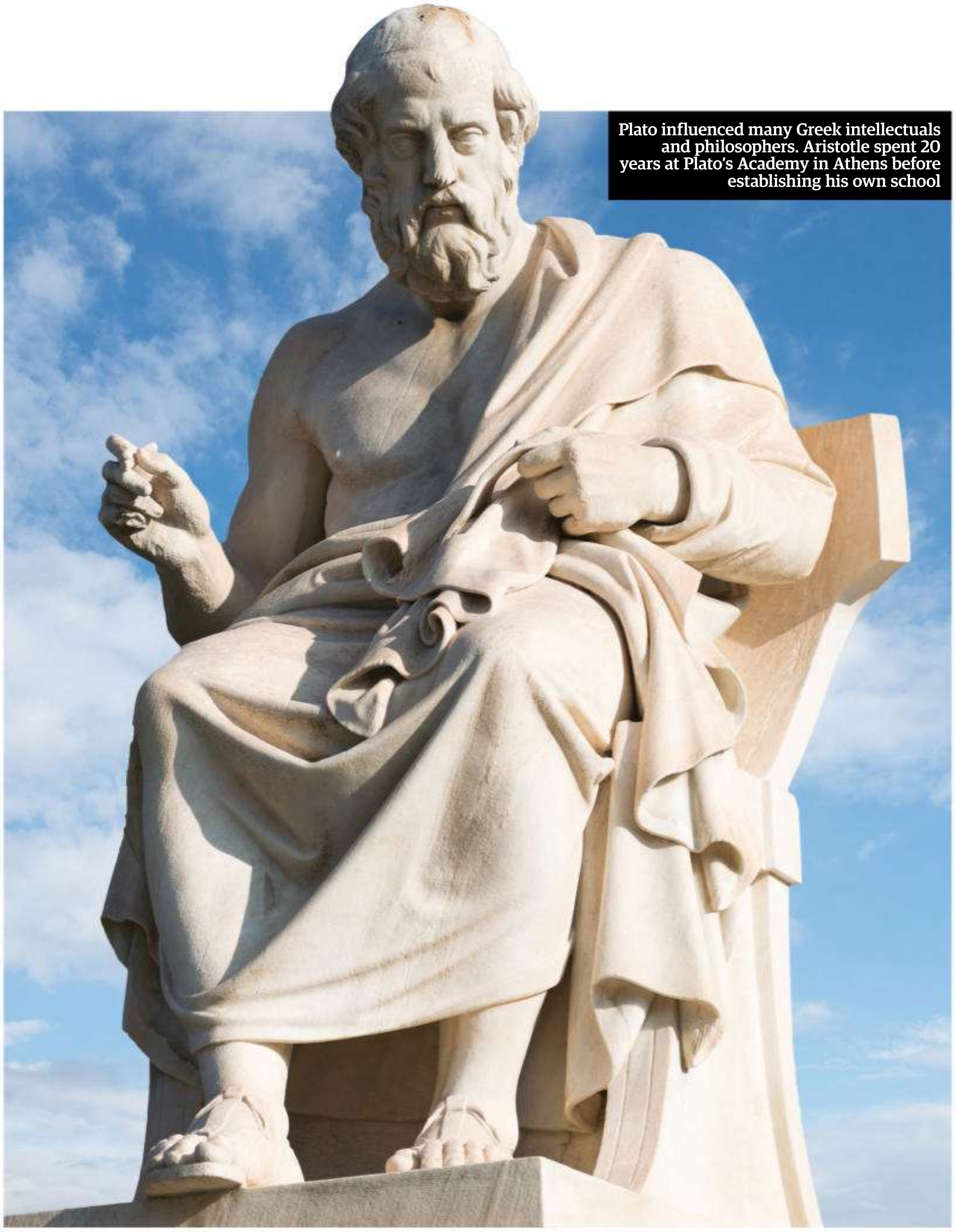
Dates c.427-347 BCE **Birthplace** Athens
Major achievements and concepts Theory of Forms, Dialogues, author of the *Republic*, founder of the Academy school

Plato, one of the most significant Greek philosophers of them all, was born around 427 BCE in Athens. He came from a wealthy aristocratic family. As a child he was unremarkable, although he was bright and did well in his studies, and benefitted from an expensive and wide-ranging education.

Plato is thought to have travelled widely in his early life, including to Italy, Egypt and Libya, but was back in Athens by the age of 40, at which point he founded one of the first ever organised schools, the Academy. His thinking was omnivorous and eclectic, encompassing ethics and politics; the concept of what constitutes wisdom; and issues around the soul and the cosmos. He stressed the importance of morality in an individual's life; acknowledged the need for laws and for just people to enforce them (the reliable, intelligent and modest 'philosopher king' was his idealised concept of the perfect ruler); and argued that the human soul was a distinct entity from the physical body. His notion of an 'ideal form' was a consciousness outside physical reality, existing by reason alone.

He produced significant volumes of written work, many of which take the form of dialogues in which Plato doesn't himself appear; he instead places his words in the mouths of other scholars and even his family. The character who appears most often in the *Dialogues* is Socrates, making it difficult to differentiate what might have been Socrates' own thinking from the philosophical positions Plato attributes to him. Historical fidelity aside though, Plato's stylistic choice has the effect of presenting lively arguments but detaching the author himself from either position, leaving the reader to make up their own mind on the stance they agree with. He wanted to stimulate thought rather than impart his own wisdom. Knowledge, he believed, could only be arrived at through a person's own efforts, rather than simply by listening to or reading others.

Most sources agree that Plato simply died in his sleep around the age of 80: one story claims a young Thracian girl played the flute at his bedside as he faded. The Academy educated many of the great intellectuals that followed Plato: most famously Aristotle. It remained in operation until its destruction by the Romans in 84 BCE, and was revived again in the 5th century, until the notion that it might represent a threat to Christianity saw it closed for good. Aristotle's reputation actually eclipsed his teacher's for several hundred years, but Plato's place in the philosophical pantheon began to be restored during the Renaissance, and was once again unassailable by the 19th century.



Plato influenced many Greek intellectuals and philosophers. Aristotle spent 20 years at Plato's Academy in Athens before establishing his own school

Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Plato imagines Socrates in conversation with Plato's brother Glaucon. Socrates describes a cave, in which a group of people are chained up. They have been in this position all their lives and know nothing else: this is their normality. Their backs are to the opening of the cave, and between the opening and the people is a fire, which casts shadows on the wall in front of them. These shadows are all the people have ever experienced, and therefore have totally informed how they understand the world. But one day the people break free of their chains and leave the cave and go outside, at which point they learn that there is more to the world than ever imagined.

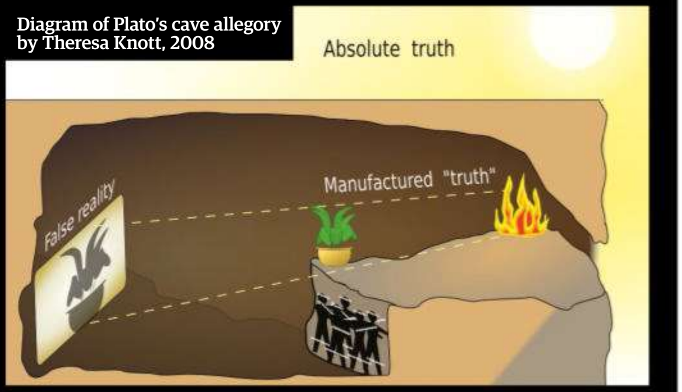


Diagram of Plato's cave allegory by Theresa Knott, 2008

This fable, Socrates tells Glaucon, illustrates what it's like to be a philosopher. Most people live in relative ignorance and are quite happy with that position. But once you begin to see the truth behind what you thought was your 'reality', you want to learn more and more.

Socrates

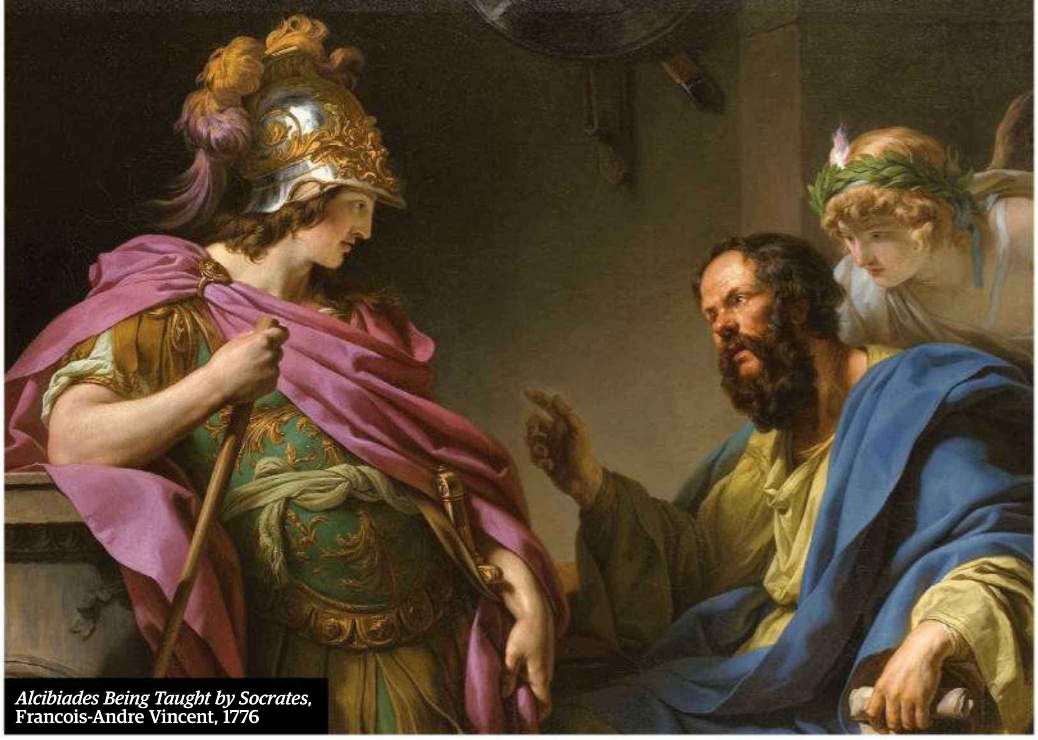
Dates 469-399 BCE
Birthplace Athens
Major achievements and concepts
Socratic method, Paradoxes

Considered one of the founders of Western philosophy, Socrates is still an enigma. None of his own works (if there ever were any) survive, and what we know of him comes from the writing of his most famous students, Plato and the historian Xenophon, and his contemporary Aristophanes, the dramatist. There's no way of knowing how fanciful or accurate their descriptions of Socrates' life and work are, but the figure they present is a colourful one.

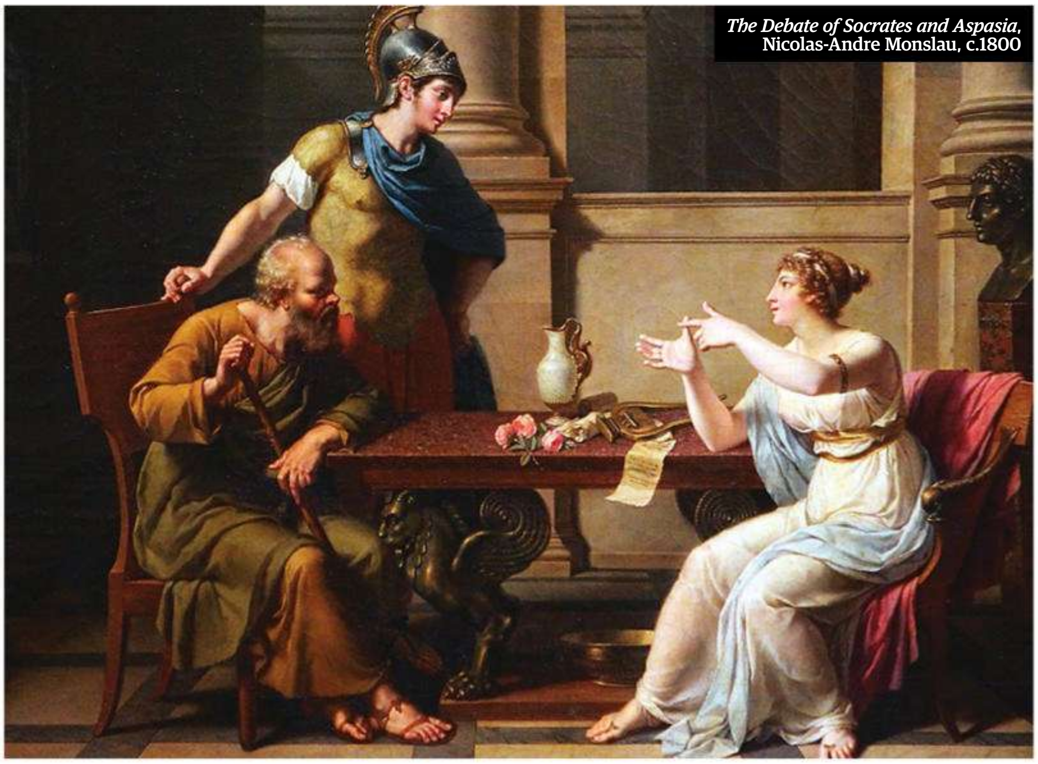
Socrates was born around 469 BCE not far from Athens, the son of a stonemason and a midwife. Initially following his father in the stone trade, he married and had three sons, and developed his taste for philosophical discussion in the workshops surrounding Athens' central public space, the Agora. He also fought as an Athenian citizen soldier (or 'hoplite') in the battles of Amphipolis (422 BCE), Delium (424 BCE) and Potidaea (432 BCE). Several sources praise him as a courageous fighter. In civilian life he largely avoided politics, but was part of the assembly that tried and ultimately executed the generals of the Battle of Arginusae for neglect of duty in 406 BCE.

Plato and Xenophon wrote about Socrates quite differently, which makes pinning down his actual philosophical beliefs difficult. But what seems clear is that he was much concerned with moral virtue and the wellbeing of the soul. His way of exploring moral concepts like virtue and justice has come to be known as the Socratic method: a conversational system of thrashing out an issue between two people. Plato and Xenophon recorded many of these discussions as the *Socratic Dialogues*. Socrates was also known for his paradoxes, the most famous of which is widely paraphrased as, "I know one thing; that I know nothing". Maintaining that lack of knowledge, his method was one of dogged questioning. He wasn't much for answers, but he was excellent at demolishing his opponents' arguments by exposing wrong-headed assumptions, contradictions and hypocrisies.

This may have been part of his downfall, since at the trial that concluded his life, Socrates employed his dialectic arguments in a way that antagonised his own jurors. He was found guilty of impiety towards the gods and of corrupting the minds of Athens' youth, and was sentenced to death by drinking hemlock in 399 BCE at the venerable age of 71. His students, however, made sure that his name and teachings were never forgotten, and so his legacy lives on.



Alcibiades Being Taught by Socrates,
Francois-Andre Vincent, 1776



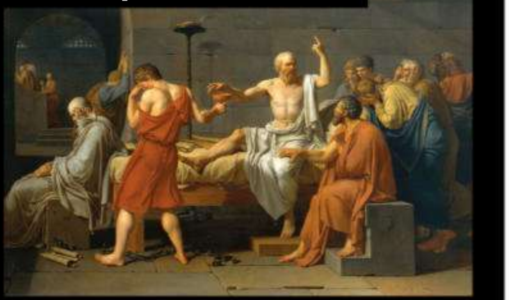
The Debate of Socrates and Aspasia,
Nicolas-Andre Monslau, c.1800

The trial and death of Socrates

The official charges brought against him were of corrupting the minds of Athens' youth and of 'impiety': speaking against the gods the city acknowledged, and even suggesting potential new ones. These accusations may, however, have been masking an ulterior motive. Socrates was a known associate of several figures who had vocally denounced the Athenian political system. Due to an amnesty of 403 BCE, charges along those lines could no longer be brought, leading his accusers to seek other avenues to curb his influence.

The great philosopher was tried for his crimes by a jury of 500 – chosen by lottery – and was reportedly found guilty by a majority of only 30 votes. He joked that his punishment should be free meals at the Prytaneum (the sacred hearth fire kept perpetually burning in the centre of Athens), and there was some talk of him simply being fined. But the chief prosecutor ultimately argued for the death penalty, and was successful. Socrates' supporters urged him to flee, but he refused on principle, and self-administered his own execution by drinking hemlock.

Socrates argues with his followers while accepting his cup of hemlock (*Death of Socrates*, Jacques-Louis David, 1787)



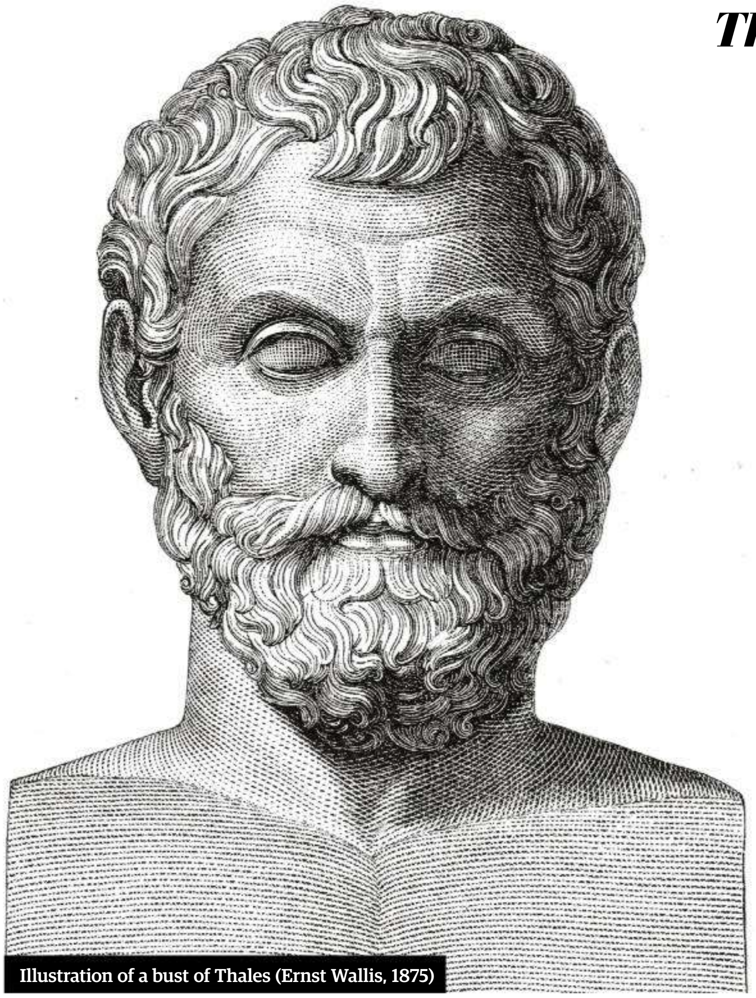


Illustration of a bust of Thales (Ernst Wallis, 1875)

Thales

Dates c.624-546 BCE **Birthplace** Miletus
Major achievements and concepts Thales' theorem, Intercept theorem, water as the source of everything

Thales of Miletus is generally considered to be the first philosopher and the 'father of science'. Radically breaking with tradition, he attempted to explain life, the universe and everything with what we would now call scientific theories, rather than mythological tales. Among his achievements were leaps in geometry, astronomy and cosmology. He calculated the size of the pyramids by the length of their shadows, and accurately predicted the solar eclipse of 585 BCE. He wasn't always right though: one of his theories was that the Earth was flat and floating in a vast expanse of water. He believed that water was the single material substance at the source all things in nature.

Thales was born sometime around 624 BCE and died between 548 and 545 BCE: the time during which the 58th Olympiad was taking place. The *Chronicle* of Apollodorus of Athens claims that Thales died of heat stroke while watching the games. His main occupation is thought to have been engineering, but his scientific acumen made him successful in business: he was said to have brought in impressive olive harvests having successfully predicted the weather.

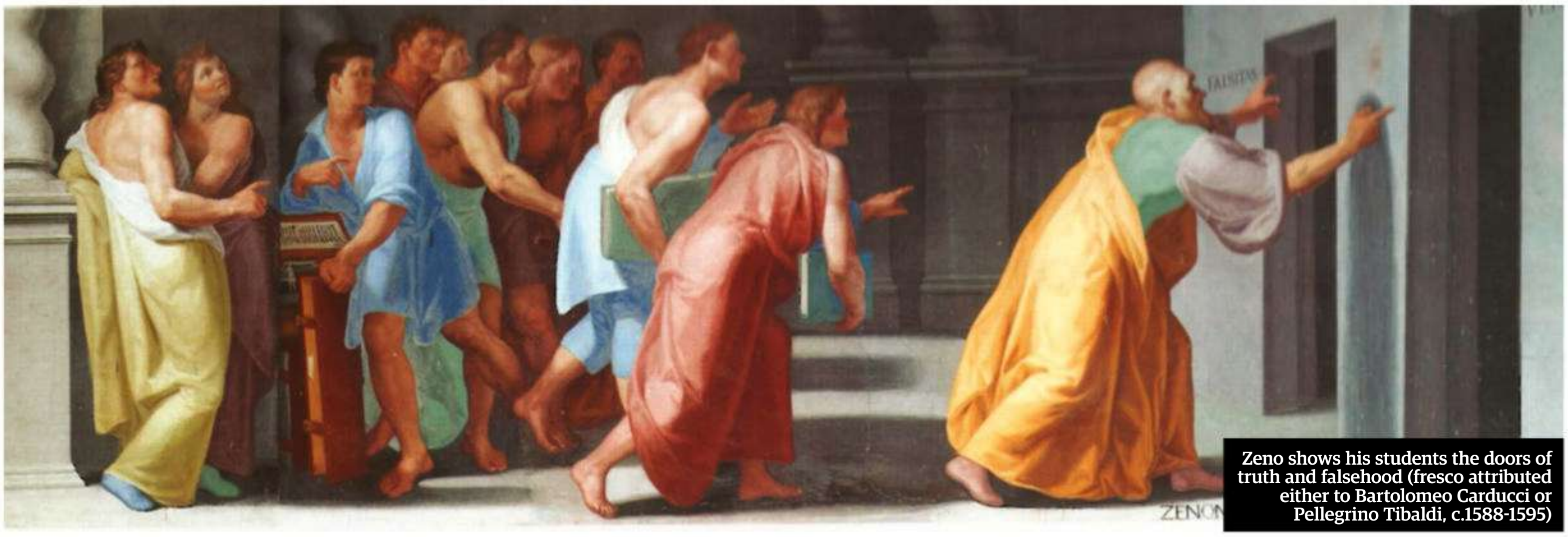
None of his writings survive: he's thought to have authored works called *On The Solstice* and *On The Equinox*, although others dispute he left behind any written works at all. He is the first known mathematician to have discoveries attributed to him.

Zeno of Elea

Dates c.490-430 BCE **Birthplace** Elea **Major achievements and concepts** Paradoxes

As with Socrates, most of what we know of Zeno of Elea comes from Plato: meaning we don't actually know anything for certain. According to the information available, however, he was born around 490 BCE, and by the time he was 40 was a favoured student (possibly even the adopted son) of the philosopher Parmenides. One of Parmenides' core beliefs was that our senses are unreliable. Zeno took this idea to deliberately absurd extremes with his famous paradoxes, which draw left-field conclusions from assumptions and were designed to provoke discussion by challenging common sense. In a dialogue, Zeno would present these paradoxes as logical truths, allowing his opponent to break them down. An infamous example is the paradox of the speedy Achilles and the slow tortoise, which states that Achilles can never catch the tortoise because he must always first reach the place the tortoise has just left: an infinite sequence of tasks that can never be completed. Eight more of Zeno's similar paradoxes survive to test philosophers to this day, but some sources claim there were once at least 40.

Stories about Zeno's life are fanciful, but more than one source attributes his death to a fight in the jail of the tyrant Nearchus, whom he was plotting to overthrow. The story goes that he offered to whisper crucial intelligence to Nearchus, but when Nearchus leaned in to hear him, Zeno bit his ear off and was immediately killed by Nearchus' guards.



Zeno shows his students the doors of truth and falsehood (fresco attributed either to Bartolomeo Carducci or Pellegrino Tibaldi, c.1588-1595)

© Alamy; Thinkstock

The philosophy of Ancient Greece

In the beginning there were myths. The earliest societies told themselves outlandish stories in order to make sense of the world. Then came the philosophers

Before the philosophers, people had worked under the assumption that human beings were the centre of all things. The Ancient Greeks had even imagined their gods as essentially people (albeit people with superpowers); always arguing and fighting among themselves, and indulging in interpersonal dramas like a sort of cosmic soap opera. With the arrival of philosophy, however, this began to change. Philosophers started to explore the idea that human beings were simply a part of a much larger system – and not necessarily its most important ingredient. They asked what our place was in the wider universe; what the world and its constituent parts were made of; and how it might have come into being. They decided made-up stories were no longer sufficient as explanations for the basics of nature, and realised that dedicated study and reasoning were the only way to work towards finding the genuine answers.

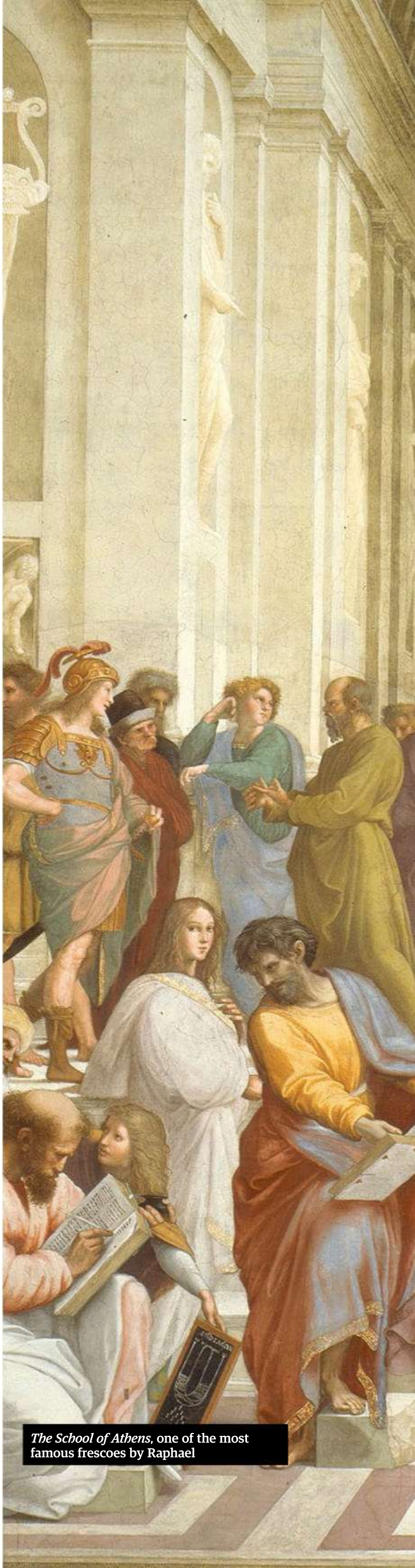
Their work took them down a bewildering array of blind alleys and dead ends, but much of what they hit on was surprisingly accurate, paving the way for the generations of thinkers that followed them, and laying the basis of everything we now know, and are still learning about. They didn't always come up with the right answers, but they asked a lot of the right questions, often realising that the questions were more important than the answers anyway.

The word 'philosophy' is derived from the Greek 'philo', meaning 'loving', and 'sophis', meaning 'wise'

The pre-Socratic philosophers were those who lived before, or at least not later than, Socrates himself. They were the first philosophers to adopt new ways of studying the nature and order of the world (cosmology), and the possible origins of the world (cosmogony).

The Milesian school is so named because its ideas stem from the philosophers of the town of Miletus. They pursued the idea that all things have their basis in one single substance – although they had rather different ideas about what that substance might be. For Thales, the root of reality was water.

The Ephesian school went with Heraclitus's conclusion that the quintessential element was fire, or at least something like it. According to this theory, everything is always 'burning', each 'form' constantly reacting with its opposite, keeping the universe in a permanent state of flux.



The School of Athens, one of the most famous frescoes by Raphael

In its modern usage, 'sophism' (or 'sophistry') has come to mean a confusing or illogical argument, or an argument for its own sake

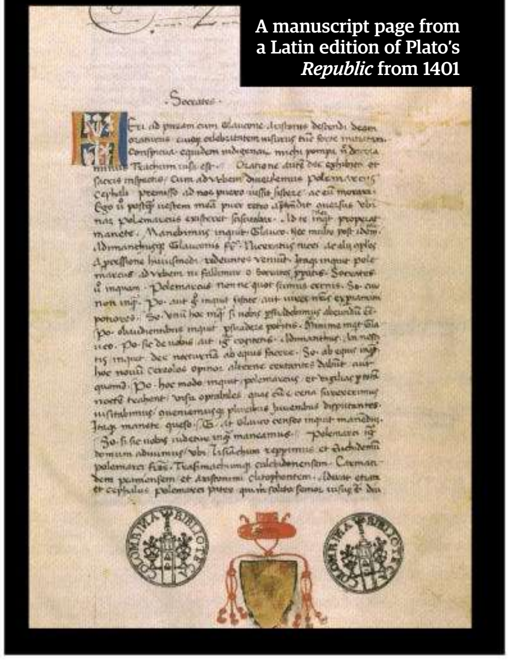
Plato's Republic

Perhaps the most famous of all of Plato's works, the *Republic* outlines his notion of the perfect government. Presented as a series of dialogues between Socrates and various others, it explores the meaning of justice, and discusses a number of existing city-states, before suggesting some hypothetical ones in their place.

For Plato, government is necessary because people aren't all perfect, and some are fundamentally better than others. He divides people into two types: those who are weak-willed and give in to their selfish desires ('akrasia'), versus those who have the integrity and strength of character to adhere to Plato's ideal of goodness ('arête'). He also suggests a social structure of three tiers: the rulers, the soldiers and the tradespeople.

Unsurprisingly, the philosophers are at the top, thanks to their abundance of arête, and their understanding of ideas and forms. Soldiers are similarly virtuous, but are fonder of action rather than deep thought. And tradespeople are the everyday dogsbodies who want to own things and sleep with people.

Plato named his ideal city Kallipolis, and believed it represented a new third way between democracy and tyranny, both of which rewarded selfishness. Philosophers, he was sure, would rule for the many and not the few.



A manuscript page from a Latin edition of Plato's *Republic* from 1401

Neoplatonic ideas influenced Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE)

Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) at one time considered himself an Atomist

> "Socrates is widely credited with bringing philosophy into the mainstream conversation of the Athens of his time"

The Eleatic school took its direction from Parmenides of Elea, whose attention focused on the act of thinking itself. He reasoned that there must be a disconnection between what actually, physically is and always has been, and our perception of that reality. Change is an illusion. Everything that exists must always have existed, because non-existence doesn't exist!

The Pluralist school grappled with that complicated notion, attempting to reconcile it with observable events like death and destruction. Empedocles agreed that non-existence was impossible, but argued that materials could be infinitely combined and recycled (this included the idea of reincarnation, which Pythagoras would adopt). Anaxagoras suggested that everything has indeed always existed, but as an infinite number of unimaginably small units.

Anaxagoras's idea in turn informed the Atomist school, which taught that tiny atoms were the hidden ingredients of all objects, and possibly even of metaphysical concepts like the soul.

Pythagoras, who gave his name to Pythagoreanism, decided instead that numbers were the bedrock of reality, because everything can be counted. From his discovery that the strings of a harp make harmonies with each other according to ratios of their length, he extrapolated that the stars had a similar relationship between numbers and harmony, making "the music of the spheres" as they moved.

But it wasn't all cosmological. The Sophists were more concerned with human beings than with esoteric arguments about the basis of reality: "Man is the measure of all things," as Protagoras put it. There were no one-size-fits-all rules for human behaviour. People should act socially and politically as individuals in the way that most benefitted themselves and their fellows.

All of the above were fundamental steps towards the classical philosophy of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Socrates is widely credited with bringing philosophy into the mainstream conversation of the Athens of his time. Plato followed in his footsteps, and was responsible for disseminating many of Socrates' supposed ideas (we only have Plato's word that his quoting of Socrates is accurate), while igniting debates of his own in the form of his famous dialogues. And Aristotle was a student at Plato's Academy, who broke away from his teacher and gave the greatest weight yet to deriving knowledge from empirical observations rather than high-minded theorising.

What followed was the era of Hellenistic philosophy, which lasted until the beginnings of the Roman Empire in the early 30s BCE. The word 'Hellenistic' itself is derived from 'Hellas', meaning Greece. Like the Sophists, they were often more concerned with day-to-day life than the substance of the universe. Among the many and varied Hellenistic schools of thought, these were some of the most significant.

Stoicism, as popularised by Zeno of Citium in the 3rd century BCE, involves limiting one's desires and accepting what life throws at you. The Stoics believed that emotional reactions result in errors of judgement, and are pointless because natural events cannot be controlled.

Skepticism, in the version espoused by Pyrrho of Elis, is about suspension of judgement. We can't trust our senses, and we can never be certain of the truth of anything. We can only have ideas – and ideas can always be argued with. This is an offshoot of Sophism, a tenet of which is that people are often mistaken. What you think is true may not be true at all. You might only be dreaming that you're reading this bookazine!

Adherents to the idea of Cynicism – such as Diogenes and Antisthenes – rejected social and material conventions as having no value. They believed that mental clarity could only be achieved by throwing off the trappings of society. Diogenes said that "bad people obey their lusts as servants obey their masters."

Epicureanism (named after its progenitor, Epicurus) has become associated with seeking pleasure, but was actually about avoiding pain, which isn't necessarily the same thing. Somewhat akin to Stoicism, the Epicureans believed that facing life with the correct attitude was important for achieving intellectual peace. Superstitious beliefs were to be avoided as the causes of unnecessary worry; if there are gods, Epicurus taught, they don't care what we do.

Anaximander thought the underpinning of the universe was a made-up substance, 'apeiron', the basis of earth, air, fire and water

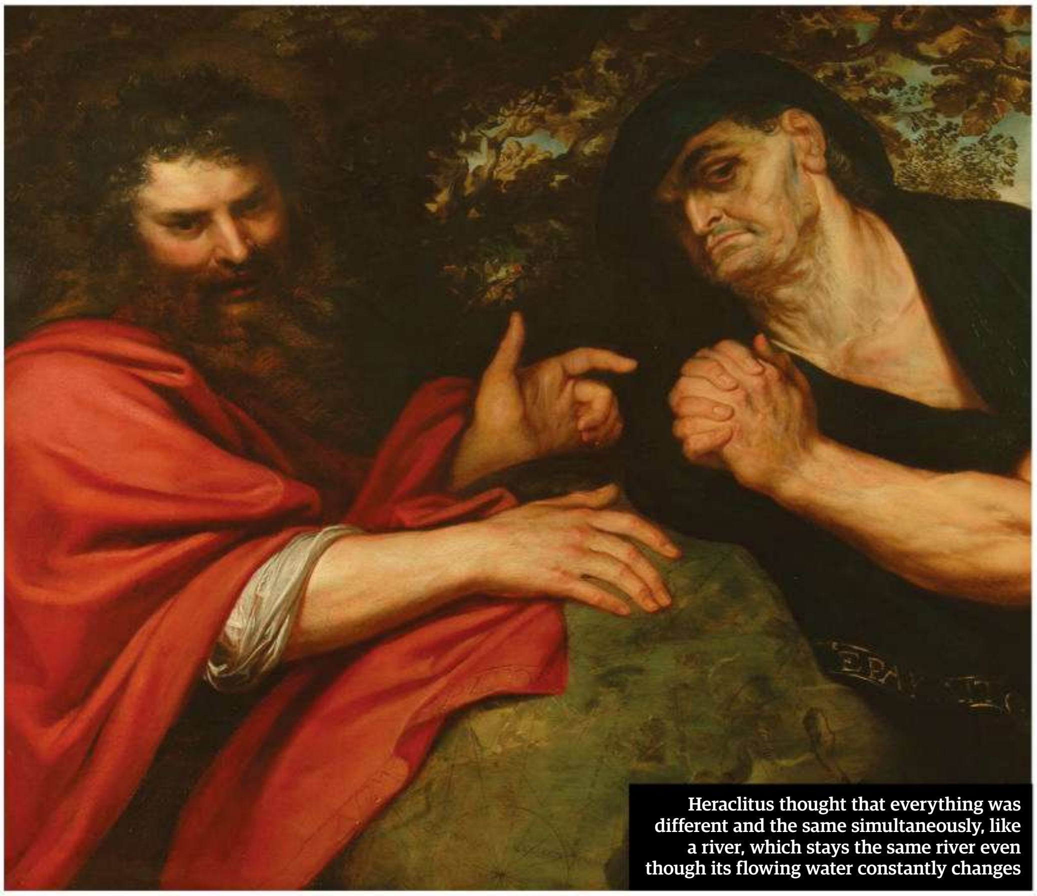
Eclecticism began to suggest that several different systems of philosophy only deviated from one another on minor points, and tried to find the commonalities rather than insist on the differences. Antiochus of Ascalon was one of its earliest proponents. He highlighted the contradictions in the arguments of the Skeptics, pointing out that you can't assert that nothing can be asserted, or prove that nothing can be proved. There may be worth in many schools of thought.

And finally there was Neoplatonism. This is more a historical term than an exact philosophical school, and the word was not actually coined until the 19th century CE. It's generally traced back to the Egyptian philosopher Plotinus, whose original intention seems simply to have been to preserve and continue the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. Gradually, however, elements of Persian and Indian philosophy were mixed in, and it became more of a religious philosophy based around the idea of 'the One' being from which the rest of the universe emanates.

Afterwards, from the early days of the Roman Empire and all through the Middle Ages and beyond, the idea of a single God began to take hold, drastically affecting the direction that philosophy took. It was now competing with religion, and thinkers turned their attentions to reconciling reason with faith.

Neoplatonism was a reasonably good fit for this new era. Its idea that evil stems from human sin and simply the absence of good, for example, was an early influence in the work of the early Christian theologian Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE). It proved equally significant for the Italian theologian Saint Bonaventure almost a thousand years later, and on the subsequent Italian Renaissance. Neoplatonism provided a bridge between philosophy and religion for centuries.

But Atomism also saw an explosion of revived interest in the 16th and 17th centuries, informing the pioneering scientific work of Nicolaus Copernicus and Galileo Galilei, and the philosophical investigations of Sir Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes. In fact, while some are now obscure, practically all of the Ancient Greek philosophies retain some interest and relevance to this day, as the very fact that we're still talking about them suggests. They may be ancient, but many centuries on, they can still teach us new ways of thinking.



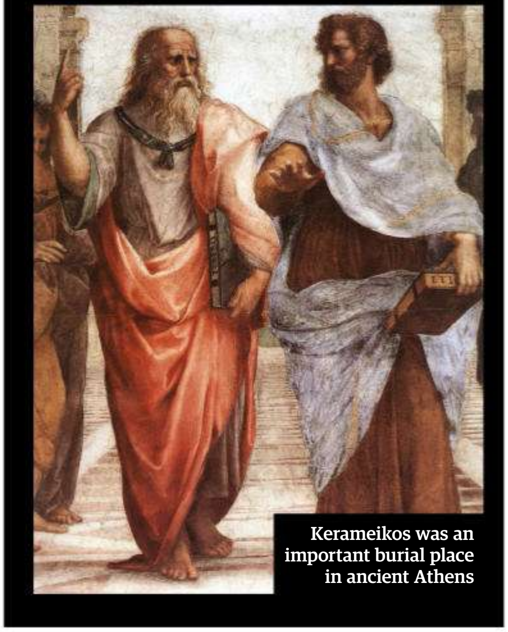
Heraclitus thought that everything was different and the same simultaneously, like a river, which stays the same river even though its flowing water constantly changes

Platonic idealism

For Plato, ideas were real – the 'forms' that give shape to the world around us. These forms were the perfect examples of things that exist in the world, with the versions we encounter on an everyday basis merely imperfect copies. You might have in your head, for example, a perfect image of a magnificent oak tree. That is the form, whereas the scraggly oaks in your local park are the reality. Another example might be a row of biscuits in a bakery. The biscuits themselves are the reality, but the biscuit cutter they came from is the form.

Plato believed that everyone is born with an innate understanding of the world of forms, but it gets obscured as we grow older. The fact that we can figure out these forms through logical deduction was, according to Plato, 'remembering' things we have never experienced, and therefore proof of an immortal soul.

The task of the philosopher then, is to progress towards the world of forms, rather than that of imperfect reality; to identify ideas, and bring one's life and thoughts into accordance with them. It's a big ask, since perfection is hard to achieve. But the destination is less important than the journey.



Kerameikos was an important burial place in ancient Athens

The Ancient Olympics

Explore the origins of the Olympics, from the festival, athletes and events to the mythology

THE FESTIVAL

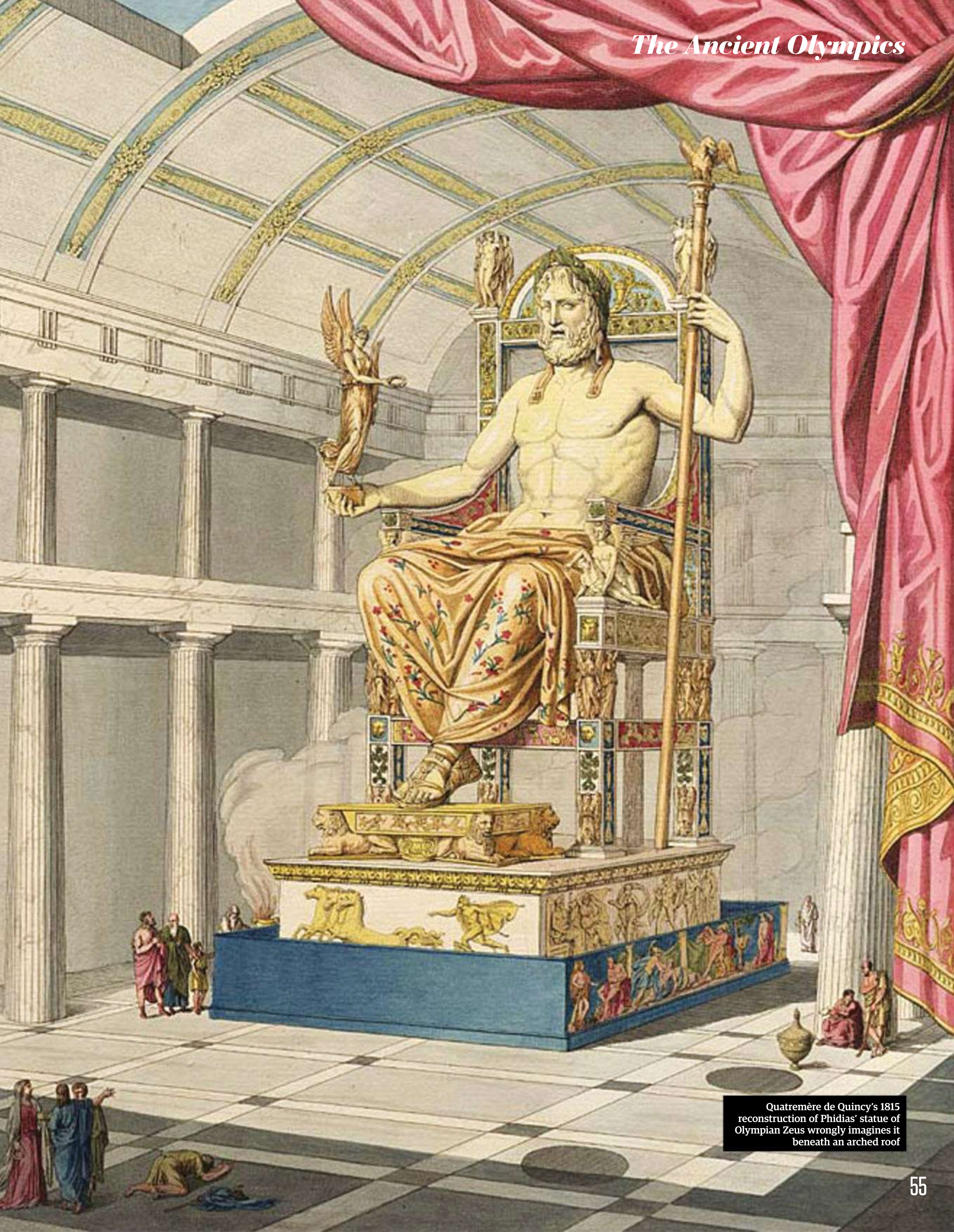
Every four years from 776 BCE to around 425 CE, competitors and spectators flocked to a sanctuary in southern Greece to participate in one of the most extraordinary events of the ancient world. It was a festival in honour of Zeus, king of the gods, who ruled from the snow-capped peaks of Mount Olympus far to the north. Indeed, it was from Olympian Zeus that the location of the sanctuary was named: Olympia.

The festival had humble origins. In its early years, participants came mainly from Elis, the city just under 65 kilometres away that controlled the sanctuary. On the morning following the August full moon, they sang hymns, chanted prayers, and sacrificed oxen to Zeus, burning the bones and fat on the altar as an offering before cooking the meat for that evening's banquet. As the mouth-watering aromas filled the air, many of those present made their way a little to the east, stripped down to their loincloths – only from 720 BCE were competitors naked – and, while the rest looked on, raced back to the finishing line near the altar. The distance, around 180 metres, was called in Greek a 'stade', the origin of our word 'stadium'. In 30 seconds the race was over, and in 776 BCE the winner was proclaimed. He was a local baker called Coroebus, that year's only victor, for the foot race was the only contest. The Olympic Games began as one Olympic game.

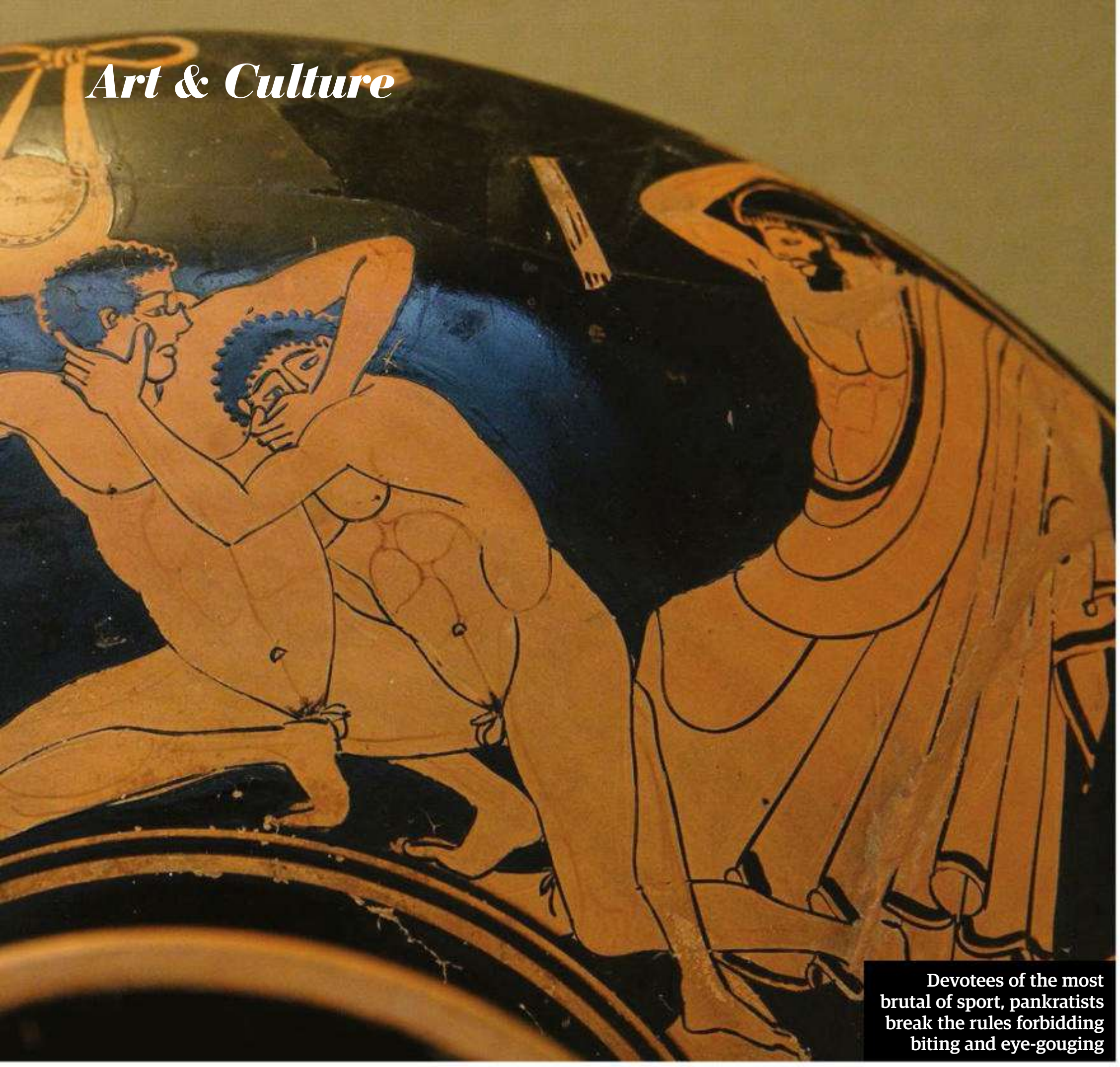
So it remained for two generations, but from 724 BCE other events were introduced, and the reputation of the festival began to spread. Coincidentally, this was a time of new beginnings for the Greeks, as many mainland cities sent shiploads of citizens to plant new settlements in foreign lands from Marseilles in the west to Byzantium in the east, and from Cyrene in Libya to Epidamnus in modern Albania. As the Greek footprint expanded, Greeks felt a growing need to maintain, or create, a cultural identity. The 5th century BCE historian Herodotus writes that what united them was "kinship in blood and speech, the shrines of gods, the sacrifices that we have in common, and the similarity of our lifestyle". He might have added 'competitiveness', because inspiring almost every Greek was the advice given to Achilles in the *Iliad*, a poem like the Olympics with its roots in the 8th century BCE: "Always to be best and to surpass all others".

As the *Iliad*, with its tales of bravery culminating in funeral games for Patroclus, was fuelling the Greeks' imaginations, the setting where they could locate themselves as the true heirs of the heroes of the Trojan War was fast becoming recognised as Olympia and, although other sports-related festivals sprang up – notably at Delphi, Corinth and Nemea – the Olympics reigned supreme. By the 6th century BCE, competitors were arriving from all over the Greek world and, when in the early 5th century mainland Greeks successfully fought off the Persian invasions while Sicilian Greeks defeated the Carthaginians and Etruscans, it was at Olympia that they made offerings of thanks.

As the festival's status grew, the Games expanded to cover five days. At the same time, new opportunities to display power through sacrifice and banquets meant that Olympia was



Quatremère de Quincy's 1815 reconstruction of Phidias' statue of Olympian Zeus wrongly imagines it beneath an arched roof



Devotees of the most brutal of sport, pankratists break the rules forbidding biting and eye-gouging

> “Olympia was now attracting not just athletes but the rich and influential”

now attracting not just athletes but the rich and influential, as well as kings and politicians eager to strut the international stage, hold high-level conferences and negotiate high-profile deals. Many were keen to compete in the chariot race, the Games’ most expensive event. Among them was Alexander I, King of Macedon, whose people many considered not to be pure Greeks. In 504 BCE, he successfully proved his eligibility by tracing his ancestors back to the Peloponnesian city of Argos. Almost a century later in 416 BCE, the Athenian playboy politician Alcibiades too used the Olympic chariot race to proclaim his wealth and power by entering an unrivalled seven teams. Unsurprisingly he won, and to celebrate he entertained the spectators to a banquet, paid for in part by his wealthy backers from the Aegean islands of Chios and Lesbos.

Meanwhile, as the numbers of attendees swelled, others were attracted, too: not just merchants hoping to make valuable sales, but writers such as Herodotus, who read his *Histories* from the portico of Zeus’ temple; artists such as Zeuxis, the inventor of trompe l’oeil, who wafted round Olympia in a cloak advertising his name in golden letters; and poets like the praise-singer Pindar, eager to win commissions from victorious athletes. Although the far-seeing orator Isocrates used the panhellenic gathering to make heartfelt pleas for Greek unity in the face of strong aggressors, they fell on deaf ears. At the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE, Philip II of Macedon defeated the mainland Greek states and marked his victory by erecting his ‘Philippeion’ — a round temple containing statues of himself and his family — at Olympia next to the Temple of Hera, wife of Zeus.

Under the Roman Empire the Olympics continued to thrive, though occasionally an emperor might bend the rules. In 67 CE, Nero not only rescheduled the Games to allow him to take part, he also tried to show his prowess by driving his own ten-horse chariot. But nothing went to plan. His biographer Suetonius records: “He fell from his chariot and was helped back in, but he could not continue and gave up before the end. Even so he won the victor’s crown.”

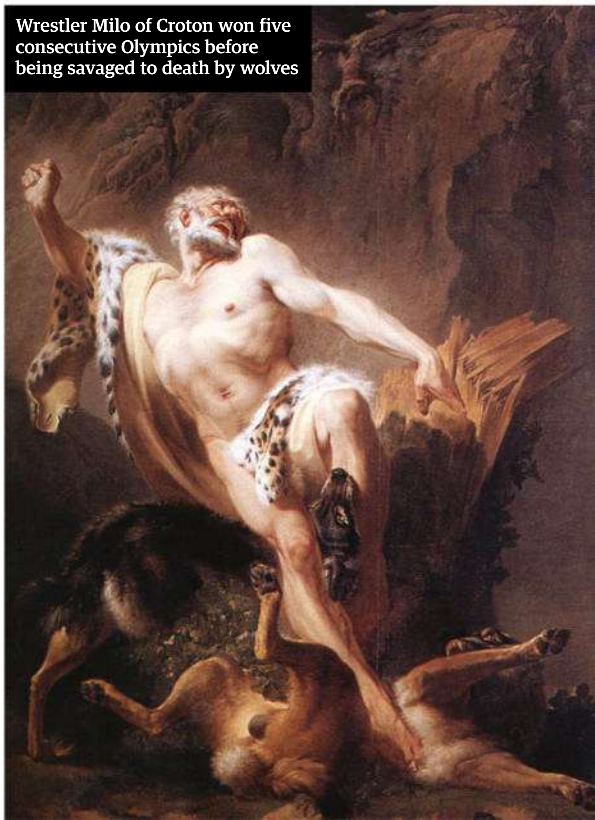
At last Christianity put paid to the Olympic Festival. After all, it was in honour of a pagan god. Outlawed in 391 CE by the Christian Emperor Theodosius, the Olympics struggled on for another 30 years, however, by 425 CE the Games were no more.

MYTHOLOGY

All classical accounts of the Olympics’ origins involved mythology. Some maintained that it was at Olympia that Zeus defeated his father Cronus and assumed control of gods and mortals. Others claimed that Heracles established the first Games to celebrate his victory over the local King Augeas, who had refused to pay the hero for one of his 12 labours, cleansing the royal stables.

Still others disagreed. For them, the founder of the Games was Pelops, an Ionian prince from Phocaea (modern Foça in Turkey). Learning that the wealthy Greek King Oenomaeus was offering his daughter, Hippodamia, in marriage to whomever beat him in a chariot race, Pelops was determined to win. Even though he possessed a team of magical horses, a gift from the god Poseidon, he took no chances. He bribed the chariot technician, Myrtilus, to remove the lynch pins from Oenomaeus’ wheels and substitute them with wax replicas. As the wheels rotated ever faster, the friction made these lynch pins melt; the chariot collapsed and Oenomaeus was dragged to an excruciating death. However, instead of honouring his side of the agreement (to let Myrtilus sleep with Hippodamia), Pelops threw him off a cliff. But Myrtilus’ ghost haunted Pelops, and the only way he could appease it was by performing funeral games - the first Olympic Games.

The influence of all three foundation myths were felt at Olympia. Dominating the Altis was a magnificent Temple of Zeus, within whose incense-laden inner chamber was a stunning statue of the seated god wearing the olive crown, awarded to victorious athletes. Created in a specially built onsite workshop by the Athenian sculptor Phidias, it was 12 metres high and faced in gold and ivory, the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World located on Greek soil. Such was its numinous beauty that even the 2nd century Stoic philosopher Epictetus enthused that “people would consider it a great misfortune to die without ever seeing it”. Transported to Constantinople by rapacious Romans, the statue was destroyed by fire in 462, but we can still appreciate its power: Byzantine iconographers used it as their model for the face of God.



Wrestler Milo of Croton won five consecutive Olympics before being savaged to death by wolves

Meanwhile, a stone's throw from Zeus' temple to the north, Pelops' grave mound was the site of one of the festival's most solemn ceremonies, when a black ram was sacrificed to the dead hero, while Heracles, said to be the first to make this sacrifice, was praised for something altogether more prosaic. Legend told that thanks to his sacrifice to the very specifically named Zeus 'who banishes flies', Zeus Apomuios, he caused Olympia to be fly-free.

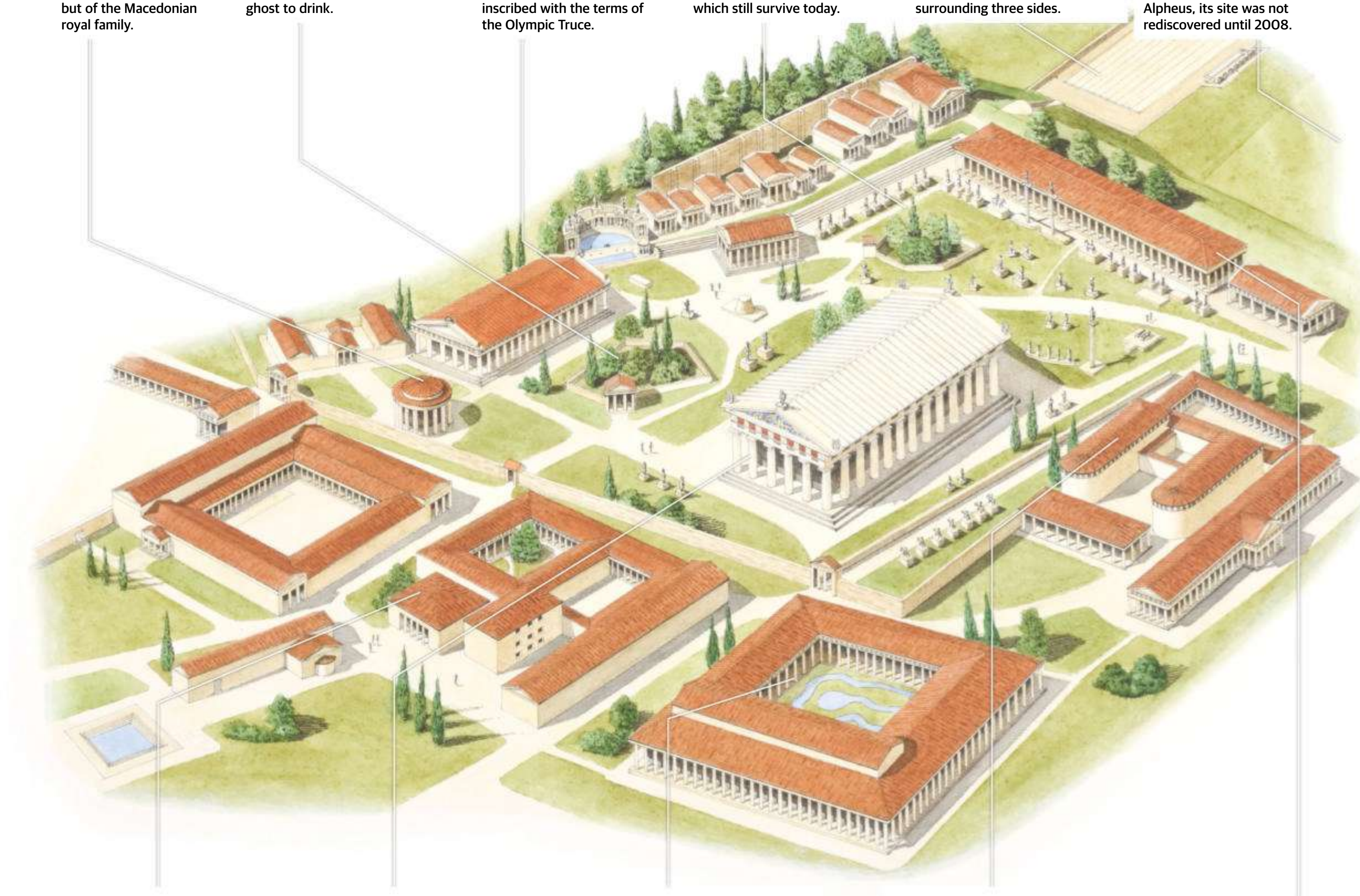
Spectators had good reason to be thankful, especially since the Games were celebrated in the scorching heat of August, when conditions could be horrendous. For the five days surrounding the new moon, those tens of thousands of spectators, who could not afford to stay at the Leonidaion – a 'hotel' built by a far-sighted entrepreneur in 360 BCE – pitched tents or slept rough outside the sanctuary with little running water and no sanitation, a jostling mêlée of increasingly rank bodies. For some, such as Epictetus, the abiding memory was "the sunburn and the filth… the cacophony, the din, the jostling, the shoving, the crowding, and so many people, each absorbed in doing his own thing". However, even he admitted: "I think you're happy to put up with all of this when you think of the splendour of the spectacles."

ATHLETES

Being a masculine religious festival in honour of dead heroes and the great god Zeus, women, with the one exception of the Priestess of Demeter, were forbidden to attend the Games – though a parallel four-yearly women's festival was held at Olympia in honour of the goddess Hera. Gender was not the only restriction. No convicted murderer could enter unless they had first undergone a lengthy

The sanctuary of Olympia in the 2nd century

Bristling with statues of victorious athletes, Olympia was dominated by the marble-roofed Temple of Zeus. Beyond Pelops' grave-mound, the original wooden columns of the Temple of Hera (700 BCE) were gradually replaced in stone, while to the northeast the stadium was separated from the sanctuary by an artificial rise



Philippeion
Built to commemorate Philip II's victory in battle, this exquisite rotunda housed statues not of gods but of the Macedonian royal family.

Grave mound of Pelops
Surrounded by white poplar trees, here, beneath the August full moon, priests slaughtered a black ram, letting its blood soak the earth for the hero's ghost to drink.

Temple of Hera
This 7th century BCE temple housed an archaic statue of the seated goddess with Zeus standing beside her, and the 'Discus of Iphitus', inscribed with the terms of the Olympic Truce.

Zanes statues
Overlooked by a row of temple-like treasuries, the statues were paid for from fines on cheating competitors, named and shamed on bases which still survive today.

Stadium
Races on the packed-earth track, 180m in length (the distance the Greeks called a 'stade'), were watched by spectators standing on the manmade mound surrounding three sides.

To Hippodrome
The 180m-long Hippodrome, scene of the thrilling horse- and chariot-races, was an elliptical race track. Buried in silt by the flooding River Alpheus, its site was not rediscovered until 2008.

Phidias' Workshop
An exact replica of the interior of Zeus' Temple (save for the addition of windows), Phidias created the god's gold and ivory sculpture here before assembling it in situ.

Temple of Zeus
Adorned with exterior sculptures showing mythological scenes, the temple housed a 12m-high seated statue of Zeus faced in gold and ivory, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Leonidaion
73m square and constructed between 330 and 320 BCE by Leonidas of Naxos, this proto-hotel featured a central courtyard with fragrant shrubs and splashing fountains.

Bouleuterion
In this complex of two apsidal buildings flanking a central chamber with a colonnaded frontage, the Olympic Council met, presided over by a forbidding statue of Zeus Horkios ('Zeus, Oath God').

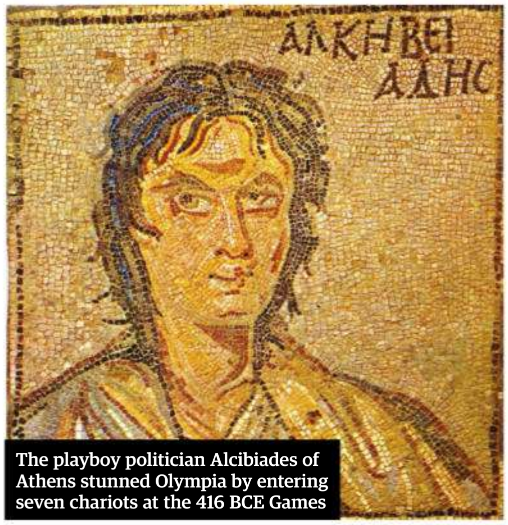
Stoa of the Echoes
This stoa (portico), 90m long, was begun in the mid 4th century BCE. Excellent acoustics made it the ideal setting for contests between trumpeters.

purification ritual and all participants were required to speak fluent Greek. Theoretically, any free man could take part, irrespective of social status. Indeed, the flamboyant Alcibiades refused to participate in any sport except chariot racing, the preserve of the rich, because it would mean competing with people of a lower class.

The only other category involved age. There were a handful of contests for boys: boxing, wrestling, the 'stade' race, and – for one year only in 628 BCE – the pentathlon. For every other competition, athletes had to be be adults over 20. A month before the Games began, all were required to gather at Elis, the city that controlled the Festival. Here, they were compelled to train and compete in initial heats under the stern watch of the Hellanodikai ('Judges of the Greeks'), while decisions were made about who should compete in which event.

It was now, too, that age categories were decided, something that without supporting documentation could be very sensitive. Sometimes, judgements were controversial. In 468 BCE, Pherias of Aegina was prevented from taking part in the men's wrestling because he looked too young. Another contestant, Nicasylos of Rhodes, was so well-developed that he was made to wrestle as an adult even though he was only 18. He won his match, as well as others elsewhere, but so brutal were the contests that he died at 20.

It was participants in contact sports who attracted the greatest interest and controversy. Perhaps the most famous was the wrestler Milo, victorious at five successive Olympics over 20 years. Stories about his strength were numerous, and when a neighbouring city attacked his hometown of Croton in south Italy, Milo dressed in a lion skin and strode out to meet them wielding a club. Believing him to be Heracles reincarnated, the invaders fled. Even Milo's death was sensational. The travel writer Pausanias reports that "somewhere in the Crotonian territory he came across a tree of dry wood split open and held with wedges. Milo decided to put his hands inside the tree, but the wedges slipped and he was held fast. Then the wolves found him. These beasts are particularly abundant in the territory of Croton..."



The playboy politician Alcibiades of Athens stunned Olympia by entering seven chariots at the 416 BCE Games

The Philippeion, commemorating Philip II's victory over Greece, housed statues of Macedon's royal family

But it was a boxer who first brought the Games into disrepute. All participants were required to meet in the Olympic Council Building to swear an oath over the body of a boar that they would not cheat. However, in 388 BCE, Eupolus of Thessaly was found to have bribed three opponents. The Hellanodikai fined all four men and with the money set up four statues of Zeus, the so-called Zanes, on the path down to the stadium, with inscriptions naming and shaming the guilty parties. The bases of 16 such Zanes can still be seen today.

A more coveted memorial was awarded to the winner of the stade race. Individual cities were usually named each year after their chief magistrate, often leading to confusion for anyone trying to compile more regional chronologies. In the late 5th century BCE, the philosopher Hippias of Elis, wishing to create a universal dating system, invented a solution. He named 776 BCE 'the year of the first Olympiad, when Coroebus of Elis won the stade', 772 BCE 'the year of the first Olympiad,

Timeline

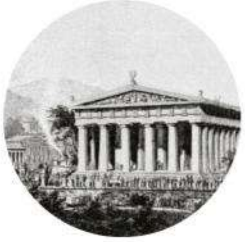
776 BCE
The first recorded Olympic Festival is held. The only contest, the stade race, is won by a local baker, Coroebus of Elis.

724 BCE
A second contest, the diaulos, is introduced, heralding a flurry of new events, including the pentathlon and wrestling (708 BCE), chariot racing (680 BCE) and horse racing (648 BCE).

720 BCE
After Orisippus of Megara won the stade race at the previous games, 'losing' his loincloth as he ran, athletes begin to compete naked, possibly believing that nudity made them faster.

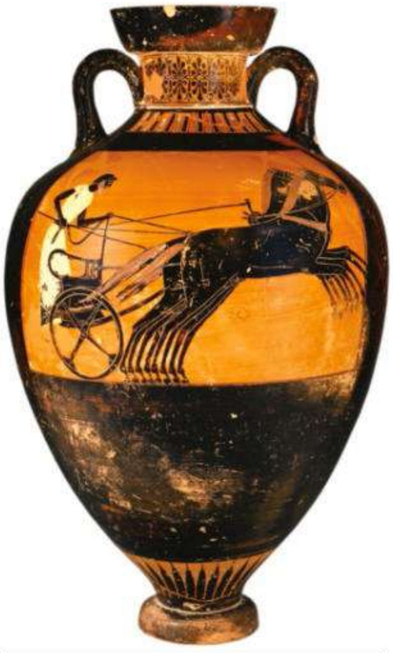
564 BCE
Arrhichion of Phigalia wins the pankration despite being dead: his opponent, in pain from a dislocated toe, gives up just before Arrhachion dies from strangulation.

458 BCE
Local architect Libon's Temple of Zeus is completed, paid for from the spoils of war against a neighbouring city-state, and adorned with sculptures showing Pelops, Apollo and Heracles.

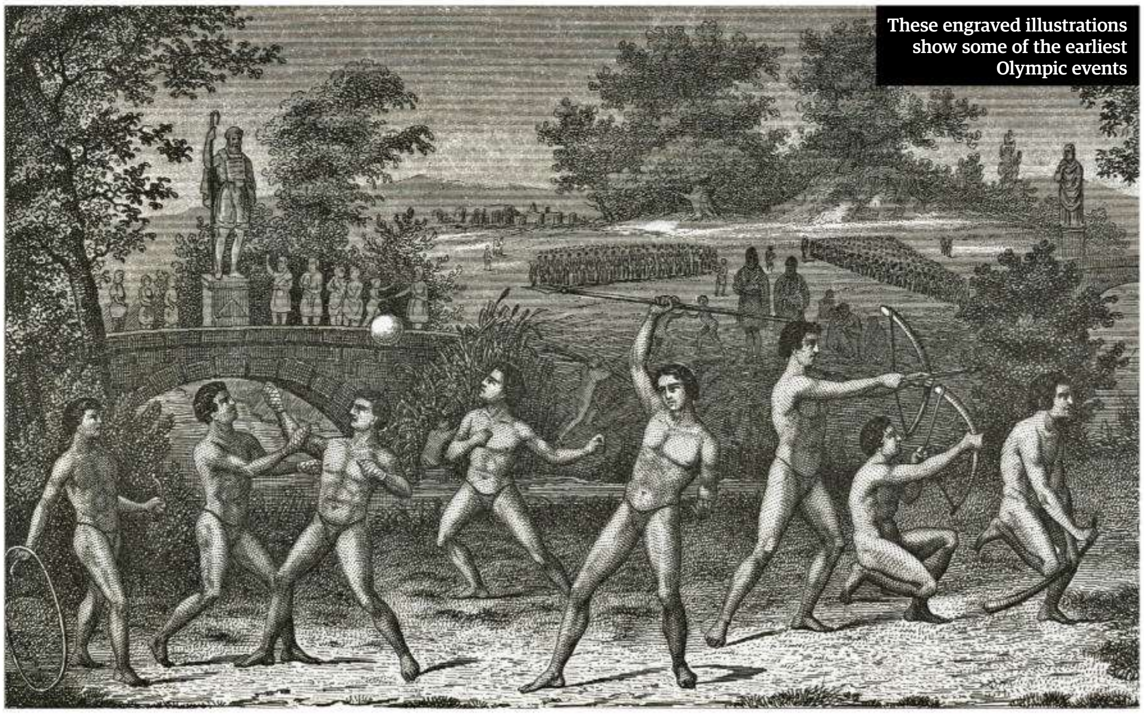


430 BCE
Phidias of Athens (who also designed the Parthenon) completes his 13-metre tall seated statue of Zeus, faced in gold and ivory, carrying Winged Victory in its outstretched hand.

416 BCE
Alcibiades of Athens appropriates the Games for his personal aggrandisement, entering a record seven chariots and treating all the spectators to a banquet.



Dressed in trademark long flowing robes, a charioteer urges on his four-horse team



These engraved illustrations show some of the earliest Olympic events

when Antimachus of Elis won the stade', and so on, with the intervening years numbered accordingly 'the second, third and forth year of the Olympiad'. His system was accepted. From then on, the Greeks effectively began their historical era with the first Olympiad, and the winner of the Olympic 'stade' race and his city were immortalised throughout the Greek-speaking world.

EVENTS

Although the stade was the first competitive event, after the introduction of the diaulos in 724 BCE others followed swiftly. Mostly these were of three types, the first being running: stade, diaulos, dolichos (4.5 kilometres), and a stade race in armour. The second consisted of trials of strength: boxing, wrestling, pankration (a deadly combination of barbaric brawling and bare-knuckle fight), as well as throwing the javelin and discus, with the third comprising equestrian sports: horse races and races for two-, four- and ten-horse chariots as well as a mule-cart races.

In addition, the pentathlon combined elements of both strength and speed. Once they were introduced, some events, such as the stade race, lasted for the entire life of the Games. Others, such as the mule-cart race, were quietly dropped.

Unlike at other international festivals, such as the Pythian Games held at Delphi in honour of Apollo or the Panathenaic Festival at Athens, the Olympics contained no formal cultural or artistic element. But there were two curious contests that had little to do with sporting prowess. Introduced in 396 BCE, the competitions for trumpeters and heralds became particularly popular when they found a new home in a colonnade built after the stadium was relocated more than 80 metres to the east of the Temple of Zeus. The acoustic of this so-called Stoa of the Echoes caused any sound to reverberate no less than seven times.

One event conspicuous by its absence is the marathon, which was inspired by an Ancient Greek athletic feat. In 490 BCE, the runner Pheidippides raced to bring the news of the Greek victory over the Persians from Marathon to Athens, a distance of just over 46 kilometres. The race was created for the first modern Olympics of 1896, held not at Olympia but in Athens, the new capital of a proudly independent Greece. It marked the dawn of a modern Olympic era, secular games that would be largely unrecognisable to Greece's classical forefathers, not least because of their ethos. Where previously athletes had striven 'always to be best', now, as their new founder Baron de Coubertin proclaimed: 'What is important in life is not to triumph, but to take part; what is essential is not to have won, but to have fought well'.

Scandal mars Pisodorus of Rhodes' win in the boys' boxing match when his trainer is found to be a woman – his mother, who narrowly escapes execution as punishment for attending.

388 BCE

356 BCE

Philip II of Macedon learns of his chariot victory and the birth of his son, Alexander the Great, on the same day. His later Philippeion commemorates his defeat of Greece.

Leonidas of Rhodes wins the stade, diaulos and hoplitodromos races, a feat he repeats in the next two Olympics. His record nine wins is broken only in 2016 by Michael Phelps.

164 BCE

40 CE

Caligula tries to remove the statue of Zeus to Rome, but his workmen refuse to continue when they hear unearthly groans emanating from inside it.

Nero builds a palace and triumphal arch near the hippodrome, 'winning' the ten-horse chariot race despite falling out and failing to complete the course.

67 CE

391 CE

With Christianity now the religion of imperial Rome, Emperor Theodosius bans all pagan worship, but the Olympic Games probably continue in some form until 425 CE.

The statue of Zeus, removed to a patrician's palace in Constantinople in 390 CE, is destroyed by fire, but it has already inspired Byzantine artists' impressions of the face of God.

462 CE

1896

Inspired by the ancient Games, English public schools and Shropshire's Much Wenlock Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin organises the first modern Olympics in Athens. The Greek Spyros Louis wins the marathon.

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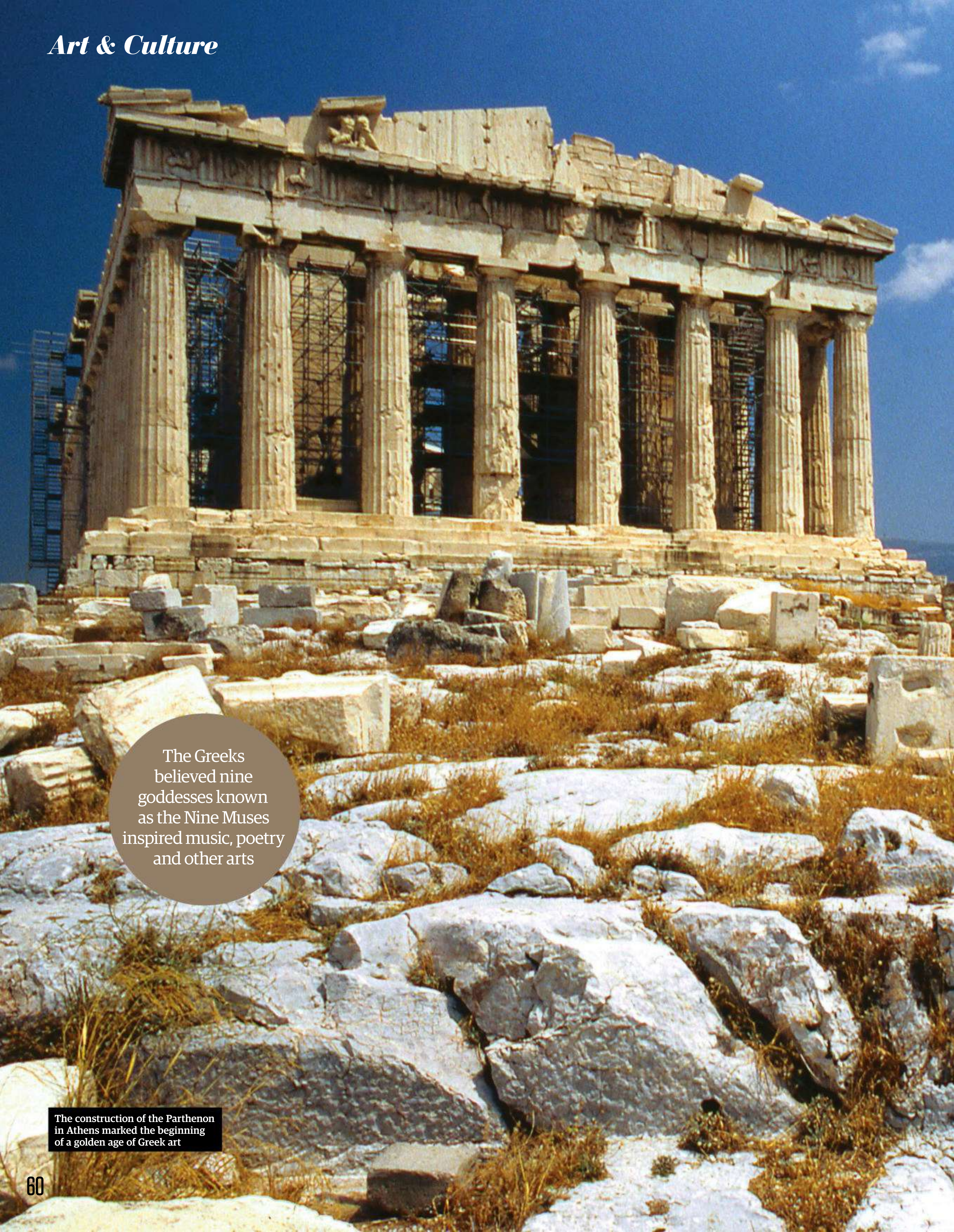


The Greeks believed nine goddesses known as the Nine Muses inspired music, poetry and other arts

The construction of the Parthenon in Athens marked the beginning of a golden age of Greek art

The arts in Ancient Greece

From inventing drama to revolutionising sculpture, the Greeks produced many great works of art that continue to inspire us today

During the 5th century BCE, Athens dominated Greece politically, economically, and culturally. Following the defeat of the Persians in 479 BCE, the Athenians organised a confederacy of allies to ensure the freedom of Greek city-states. Members of this so-called Delian League paid into a fund. However, with control of the funds and a reinforced fleet, Athens gradually turned the voluntary member states of the League into subjects. By 453 BCE, when the treasury was moved from the island of Delos to the Acropolis, Athens had become a wealthy imperial power. In an effort to consolidate his power through creating jobs and glorifying Athens, the general Pericles spent this Delian fund to support the city-state's artists and thinkers. Pericles' raiding of the treasury has been called one of the largest embezzlements in history, but it also led to a golden age in Greek art, producing some of the most marvellous creations of the ancient world.

THE APEX OF ARCHITECTURE

Pericles paid the lion's share of the Delian fund to artisans to build temples and other public buildings. These were often made from limestone and marble rather than mud and timber to better glory the gods (not to mention, Athens' reputation). The architects employed mathematics to design these buildings, often ensuring they were symmetrical, with eight columns at the front, 17 on the sides, and proportioned to a set 9:4 ratio, which the Greeks considered sacred.

The most famous of Pericles' funded projects was the magnificent Parthenon. Built as a temple to the city's patron goddess, Athena, the Parthenon stood at the top of the Acropolis hill, so everyone in the city could see its tapered columns and intricately carved pediment for miles around. Built by the architects Ictinus and Callicrates, the Parthenon is often considered the peak of Classical architecture and, in particular, the best example of the Doric order. Ancient Greek architecture was classified into three types or 'orders'. The Parthenon, like much of Western Greece, with its intentionally simplistic design with short, heavy columns was known as the Doric Order. The Ionic Order, with slender pillars tipped with curved, scroll-like flourishes, was favoured by Greek colonies in Asia Minor and the Aegean Islands. The Corinthian Order was the most ornate, decorating columns with carved leaves, was developed towards the end of the 5th century BCE.

> Praxiteles' *Aphrodite of Knidos* was the first life-size sculpture of a nude woman in Greece

BREAKING THE MOULD

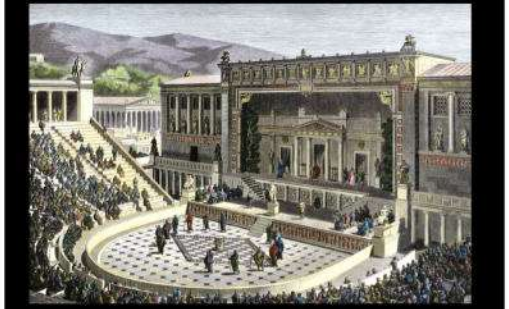
One of the Parthenon's biggest draws was that it was decorated with extraordinary, lifelike sculptures. This included a colossal statue of Athena, which was 12 metres high and made

How the stage was set

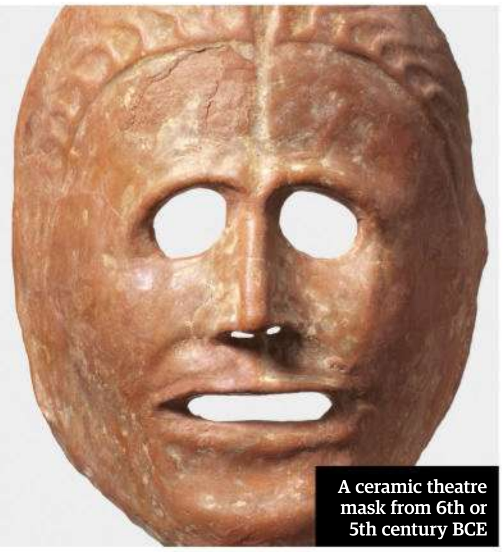
Every major Ancient Greek city boasted an open-air theatre. These arenas were arranged in a tiered semicircle, which offered the best view and acoustics so the entire audience could enjoy the performance. Early Greeks would have used the slope of a hillside for the same effect, but over time this was replaced with wooden bleachers and, by the 5th century BCE, stone benches. Though we now call this bowl-shaped design an amphitheatre, the Greeks called this block of seats the theatron, from which we derive the word 'theatre.'

Between the raised seats and the stage, there was flat often circular floor called the orchestra. Like the modern version of the word, this often housed musicians, but was principally where a play's chorus of 12 to 24 men sang and danced while providing a commentary to the actors on the main stage. Actors wore masks so that they could play multiple characters in a play. The masks may also have acted as megaphones boosting the actors' voices, so they could be heard by spectators up to 50 metres from the stage.

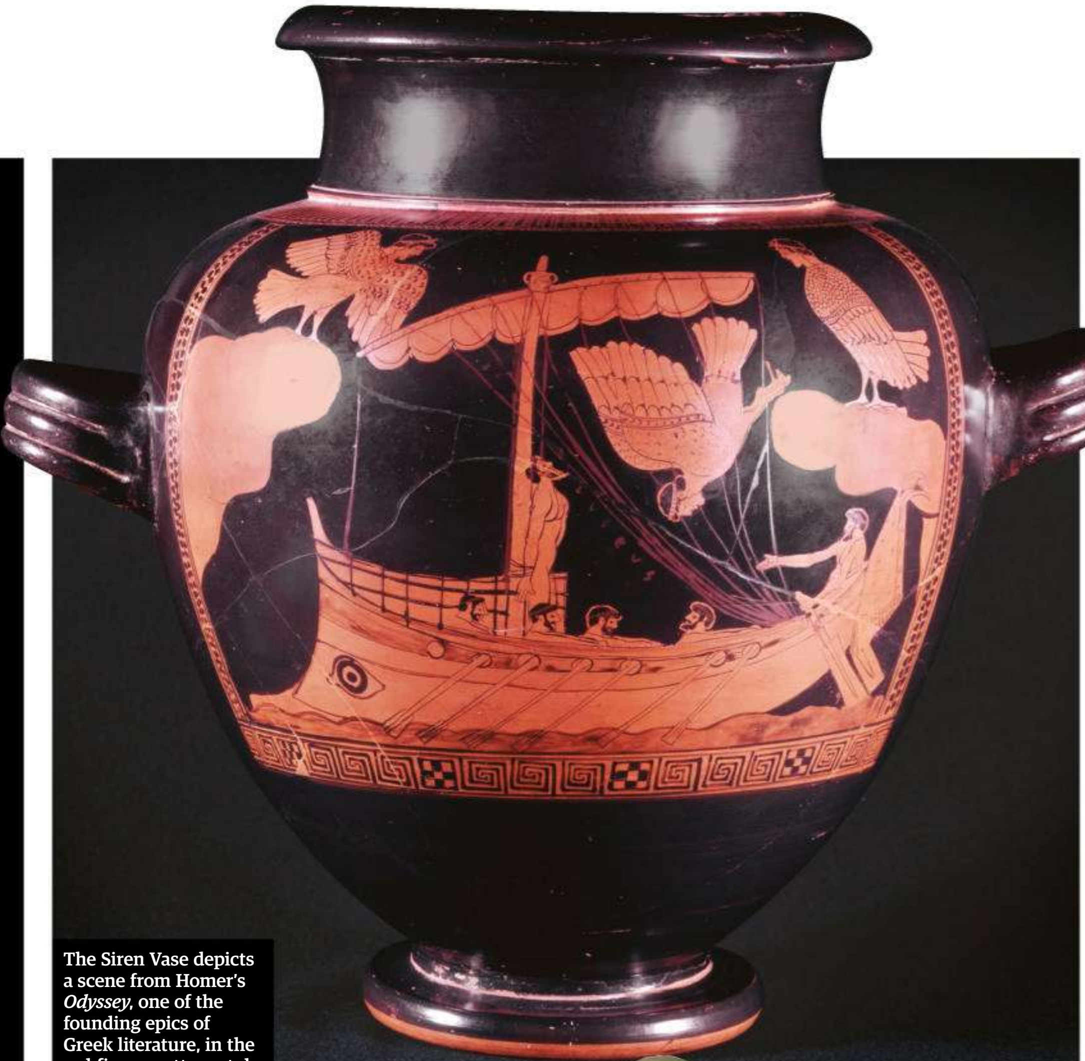
As Greek theatre evolved, dramatists employed new stage machinery: the skene was a painted backdrop that also doubled as an area for actors to change costumes behind; the mechane was a crane that would hoist actors playing gods through the air; and the ekkyklema, was a wheeled platform that would be rolled out of the skene's central doors to reveal all of the dead characters (who always died off-stage).



The Dionysus Eleuthereus is the oldest known Greek theatre and could seat 14-15,000 spectators



A ceramic theatre mask from 6th or 5th century BCE



The Siren Vase depicts a scene from Homer's *Odyssey*, one of the founding epics of Greek literature, in the red-figure pottery style

from gold and ivory. This was created by Phidias, who was also one of the leading sculptors of the Classical period. Earlier Greek statues had been rigidly posed, usually of male nudes standing to attention, with a stylised design governed by strict traditions. However, Phidias, along with sculptors Polycleitus, Myron and Praxiteles, used mathematical rules of proportions (similar to the Parthenon's architects) to create revolutionary realist figures with lifelike anatomy and posture for the first time. Gods and famous athletes were a popular subject, allowing the sculptors to chisel muscle systems in great detail and capture the natural movement of limbs, such as in Myron's *Discobolus*.

Unfortunately, not many classical statues or sculptures survive today. While some were plundered by invading forces over the years and since lost, most were destroyed over time simply because stone breaks easily, while metal ones were melted down for reuse. Based on those few that have been preserved, we think of these statues being made of lily-white marble. But archaeologists using ultra-violet light have proven that the Greeks painted their statues in vivid colours, with time and weather stripping the hues away.

POTTED POTS

The Greeks were famous for their clay pots, with vase painting greatly improving in the Classical Period. Early examples from 900-700 BCE only

Myron's *Discobolus* was an early example of the revolutionary realism Greek sculptors achieved

The Kroisos Kouros is an example of the early, Egyptian-inspired sculpture that Phidas and Polycleitus would later replace

featured geometric patterns, but by 600-323 BCE vase paintings depicted people in everyday scenes, heroic deeds from Homeric tales, legends of the gods, and even commemorated sporting achievements. Initially characters were painted onto pots using the black-figure technique, which involved sketching the motif into the clay with a sharp tool, then painting over it with a liquid clay called 'slip,' which would turn black during the firing, while the background was left the colour of clay. The red-figure technique was invented in 525 BCE and involved painting the whole pot with slip, so the background would blacken, while using glaze lines and dilute washes to paint figures, which would oxidise better during firing and stay terracotta. The red-figure technique gradually replaced black-figure because the use of a brush rather than an incision allowed potters to produce more intricate and naturalistic anatomy, garments and facial expressions, reflecting the realism trend

THE BIRTH OF THEATRE

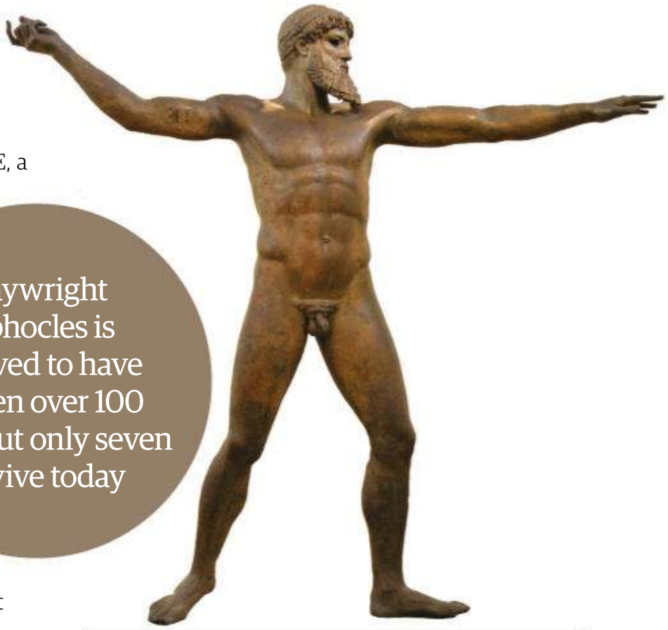
Greek drama originated in the ancient hymns that were sung to honour the gods. In 534 BCE, a wandering bard called Thespis astounded audiences at the Great Dionysia, an annual festival in Athens established by the tyrant Peisistratos, which featured singing and dancing to honour Dionysus, the god of wine. Thespis added a speech to his chorus, reciting poetry as if he was the characters whose lines he was reading, thus inventing acting. Later, Aeschylus, father of the Greek tragedy, introduced dramatic conflict by adding a second actor, while the playwright Sophocles added a third part. Though acting came to dominate drama, the chorus remained an important part of Greek plays, providing a commentary on the actions of the main characters.

> Playwright Sophocles is believed to have written over 100 plays, but only seven survive today

As it evolved, Greek theatre developed three genres: tragedy, comedy and satyr. Comedy mocked powerful Athenians for their vanity and foolishness. The first master of comedy was the playwright Aristophanes. Much later Menander wrote comedies about ordinary people and made his plays more like modern day sitcoms. Tragedy covered the themes of love, loss, pride, the abuse of power and the fraught relationships between men and gods. Typically the main protagonist of a tragedy commits terrible crimes without realising how foolish and arrogant he has been. Then, as he realises his error, the world crumbles around him. The three great playwrights of tragedy were Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, all of whom lived in Athens during the Age of Pericles, when Peisistratos' dictatorship had been replaced by democracy and free speech. Satyr plays were performed between the acts of tragedies, mocking the plight of the tragedy's characters.

ENDURING LEGACY

The golden age of Greek art did not last long, though it did continue longer than Athens political and economic superiority. While the city might have been bankrupt and exhausted after the 30-year-long Peloponnesian War, Athenian sculptures continued to lead the way into the 4th century BCE. In fact, the legacy of the art developed in this era echoed down the years. First, the Greeks culture was hastily appropriated by the Roman Empire, and in turn the Byzantine Empire. Classical art was later rediscovered and inspired Renaissance painters and sculptors like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo to pursue realism, while William Shakespeare drew on Sophocles to write his own tragedies. So-called 'Neoclassicism' drawing on Greek mythology and realist art was all the rage during the 18th and 19th centuries, when buildings like the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC and the British Museum in London were constructed as direct homages to the Parthenon.



The Artemision Bronze, which depicts the god Poseidon, is a rare example of Ancient Greek bronze sculpture and was found in a sunken ship

The Elgin Marbles

While the Romans carried off Phidias' giant statue of Athena in the 5th century BCE, many of the Parthenon's finest carved friezes were taken by the British Empire around 2,300 years later. However, they did ask permission first.

In 1800, Lord Elgin was the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, which governed Greece at that time. Finding the Parthenon in ruins, he asked if he could hire some artists to copy all of the important pieces of Ancient Greek art. The Ottomans responded that he could and "take away any pieces of stone with old inscriptions or figures thereon." Elgin took them at their word and, between 1802 and 1812, he shipped around half of the surviving statues of the Parthenon to England.

The move proved controversial, with the Romantic poet and politician Lord Byron describing Elgin as a vandal that had defaced the Greek monument, while others praised him for preserving the artworks. The British government eventually bought the statues from Elgin in 1816 (for much less money than he had hoped), giving them to the British Museum to put on public display. Today the Greeks contest the British Museum's right to the so-called 'Elgin Marbles' and their relocation back to Athens is widely debated.

The Elgin Marbles on display in the British Museum, London, but for how long?

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Ancient Greek theatres

We discover how these massive amphitheatres were built and used

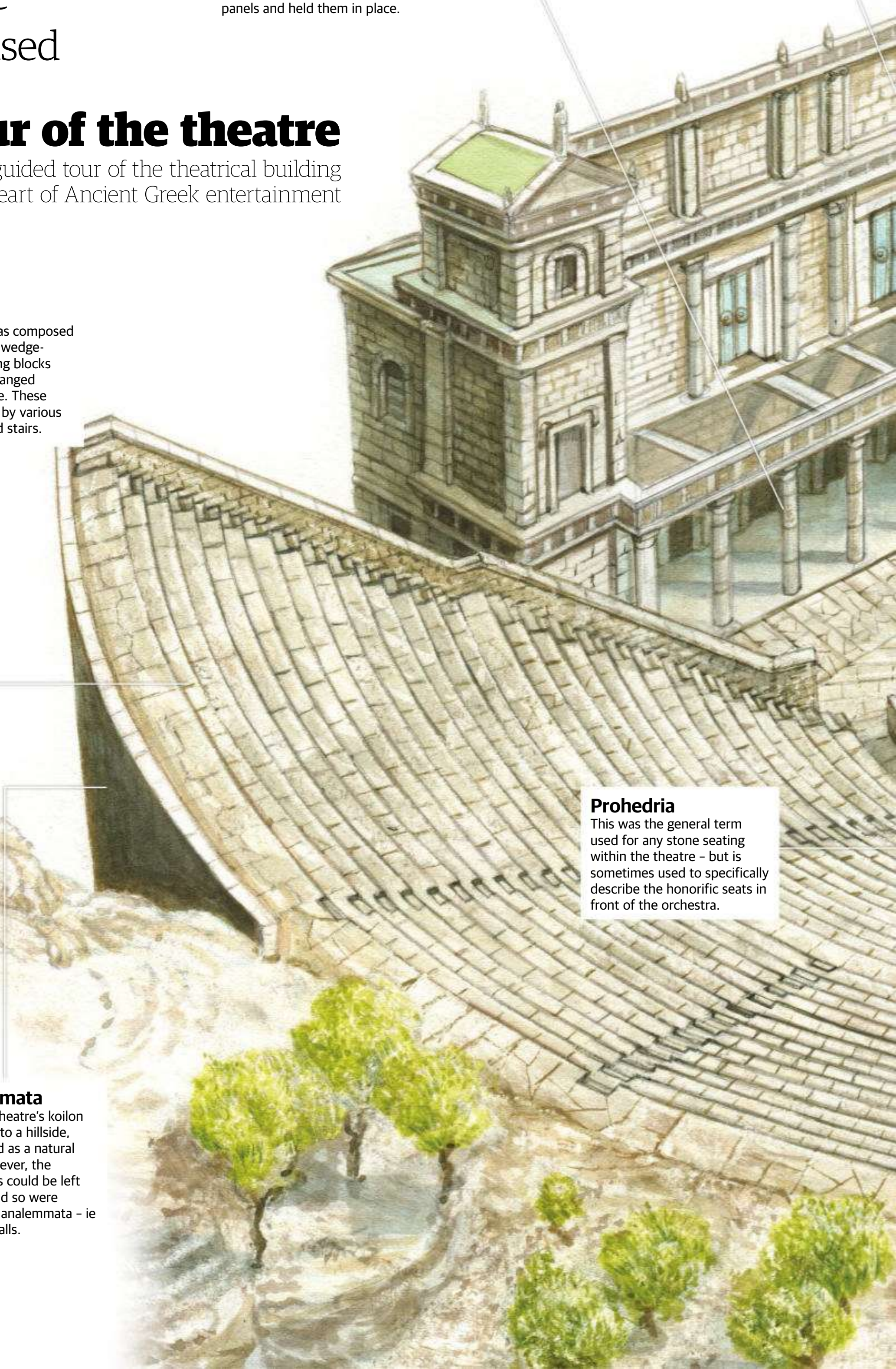
With the invention of tragedies in the late-sixth century BCE, comedies in the fifth century BCE and the satyr play tragicomedies around the first century BCE, the Ancient Greeks had to build a huge number of impressive theatres to do their plays justice. As the centuries went on – and the popularity of the theatre grew and grew – the buildings had to expand and adapt to meet the demand. Indeed, many of these semicircular amphitheatres could seat well over 10,000 people and were used frequently during religious festivals such as the Dionysia, a major celebration centred around the god Dionysus.

While the theatres of the Ancient Greeks began as simple clearings with a smattering of wooden benches for the audience to sit on, before long they had grown into full-blown sanctuary-like facilities. These included large banks of stone seats, a vast orchestra and acting area, a complex backstage network of rooms, entrances and trapdoors, as well as a wide selection of ornate and decorative scenic backdrops. These features, along with the Ancient Greeks' love for festivals, led theatres to take a central role in cementing and spreading Greek culture – something the Romans would later adopt for themselves.

Theatres were made primarily out of stone, often with the amphitheatre's seats placed into the side of a hill for extra support, while traditional construction methods for civic buildings and temples were transferred for the production of colonnades, scenery and entranceways. Interestingly, the greatest technical feat in constructing many of these theatres were the excellent acoustics, with the shape and angle of the seating arrangement and materials (limestone was a popular choice, for instance) serving as acoustic traps. These would filter out low-frequency sounds like spectator chatter and enhance the high frequencies of the performers' voices.

Tour of the theatre

Take a guided tour of the theatrical building at the heart of Ancient Greek entertainment



Thyroma
These structures were stone pillars into which vertical grooves were cut. The grooves received the painted background panels and held them in place.

Episkenion
The upper storey of the skene. Accessed by a ramp or stairwells, it provided an additional acting/singing space.

Kerkis
The koilon was composed of a series of wedge-shaped seating blocks (kerkides) arranged in a semicircle. These were divided by various walkways and stairs.

Prohedria
This was the general term used for any stone seating within the theatre – but is sometimes used to specifically describe the honorific seats in front of the orchestra.

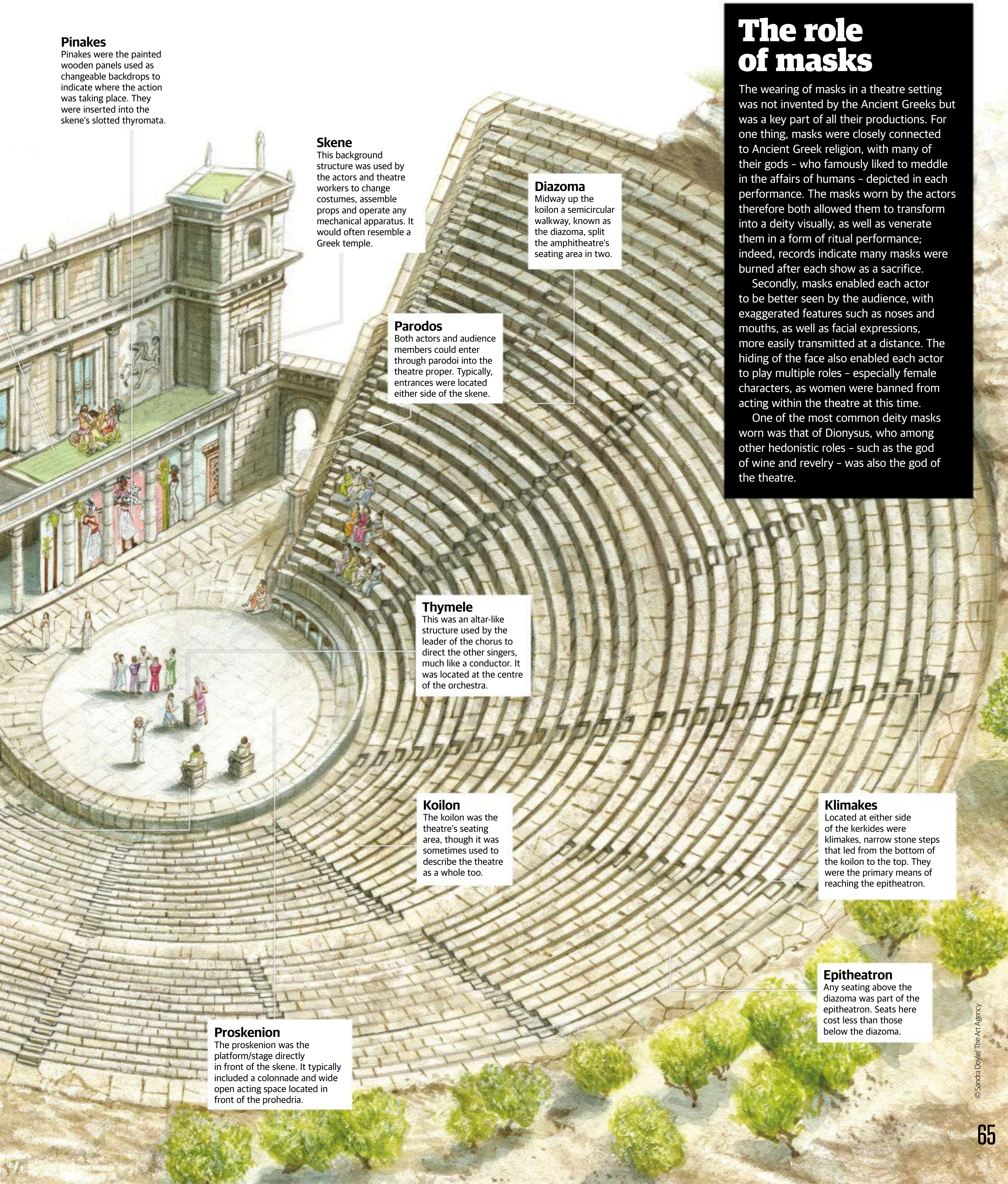
Analemmata
Often the theatre's koilon was built into a hillside, which acted as a natural brace. However, the outer edges could be left exposed and so were secured by analemmata – ie retaining walls.

The role of masks

The wearing of masks in a theatre setting was not invented by the Ancient Greeks but was a key part of all their productions. For one thing, masks were closely connected to Ancient Greek religion, with many of their gods – who famously liked to meddle in the affairs of humans – depicted in each performance. The masks worn by the actors therefore both allowed them to transform into a deity visually, as well as venerate them in a form of ritual performance; indeed, records indicate many masks were burned after each show as a sacrifice.

Secondly, masks enabled each actor to be better seen by the audience, with exaggerated features such as noses and mouths, as well as facial expressions, more easily transmitted at a distance. The hiding of the face also enabled each actor to play multiple roles – especially female characters, as women were banned from acting within the theatre at this time.

One of the most common deity masks worn was that of Dionysus, who among other hedonistic roles – such as the god of wine and revelry – was also the god of the theatre.



Pinakes
Pinakes were the painted wooden panels used as changeable backdrops to indicate where the action was taking place. They were inserted into the skene's slotted thyromata.

Skene
This background structure was used by the actors and theatre workers to change costumes, assemble props and operate any mechanical apparatus. It would often resemble a Greek temple.

Diazoma
Midway up the koilon a semicircular walkway, known as the diazoma, split the amphitheatre's seating area in two.

Parodos
Both actors and audience members could enter through parodoi into the theatre proper. Typically, entrances were located either side of the skene.

Thymele
This was an altar-like structure used by the leader of the chorus to direct the other singers, much like a conductor. It was located at the centre of the orchestra.

Koilon
The koilon was the theatre's seating area, though it was sometimes used to describe the theatre as a whole too.

Klimakes
Located at either side of the kerkides were klimakes, narrow stone steps that led from the bottom of the koilon to the top. They were the primary means of reaching the epitheatron.

Epitheatron
Any seating above the diazoma was part of the epitheatron. Seats here cost less than those below the diazoma.

Proskenion
The proskenion was the platform/stage directly in front of the skene. It typically included a colonnade and wide open acting space located in front of the prohedria.

© Sandra Doyle/The Art Agency

The art of architecture

The Greeks didn't just build some of the world's most iconic buildings; they inspired future generations to build even more

More than two thousand years after the heyday of their ancient civilisation, Greek and Greek-influenced buildings are instantly recognisable. Many are iconic. Think of the skeletal remains on the Acropolis, framed against the Athenian skyline, one of the most famous modern cityscapes. A huge number of public structures in the Western world from the Renaissance onwards are directly influenced by classical Greek architectural style, including famous examples such as the British Museum's façade in London, the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, and the United States Capitol in Washington, DC. The characteristic columns and pediments, arranged with careful attention to symmetry and proportion, are obvious and distinctive wherever they appear; they are emblematic of the ancient Mediterranean world and its civilisation.

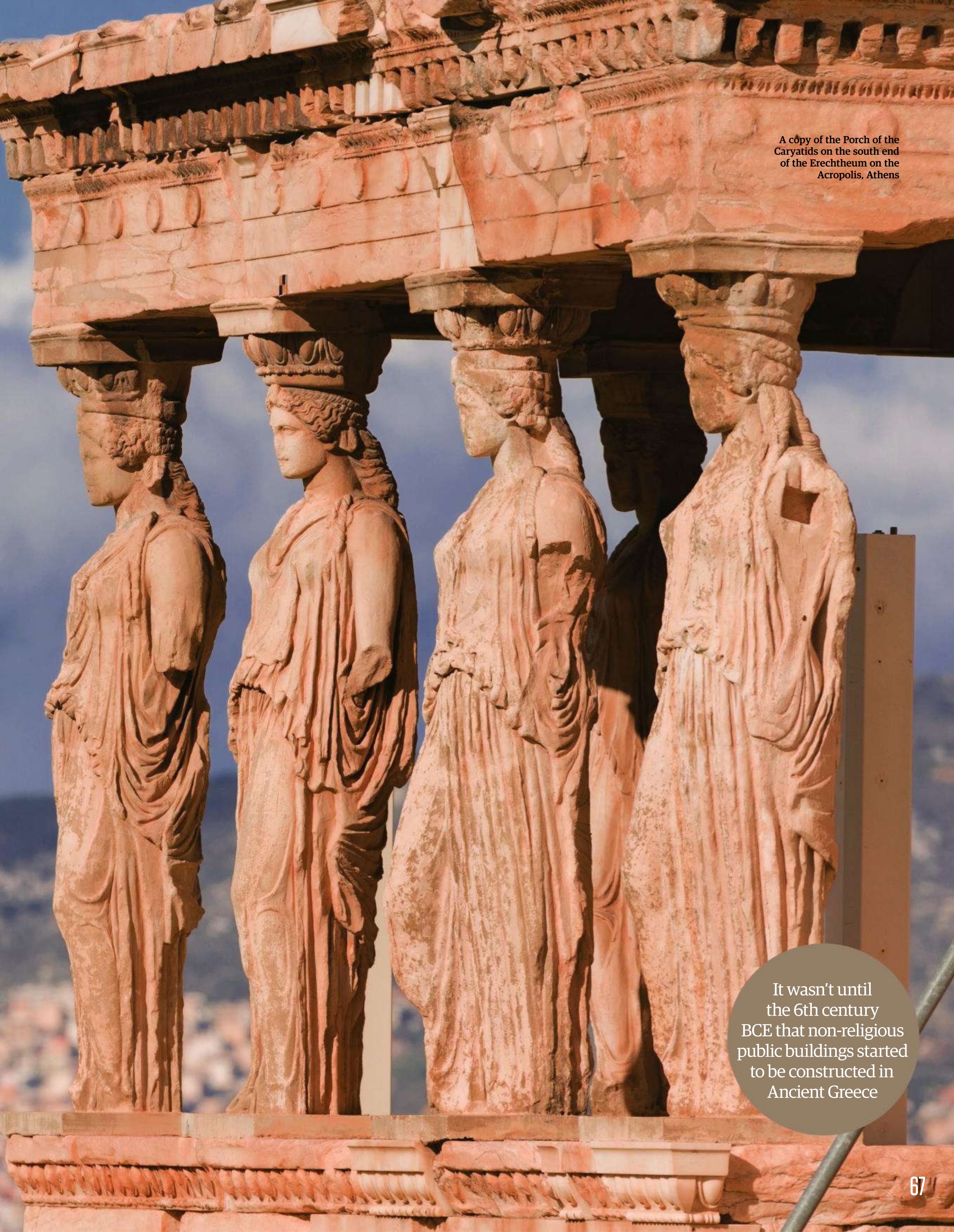
The legacy isn't only physical; Greek architectural principles were the foundation for Roman – and then later Western – theory and practice, in particular for public architecture, while the Greeks also invented types of buildings, such as stadiums and theatres. Even buildings that don't look obviously 'classical' often obey the rules of proportion that the Greeks established.

The classical Greek style is most often seen in public buildings, and this is not by chance. The classical Greek world (roughly from 500 BCE to the time of Alexander the Great in the late 4th century BCE) had few mansions or palaces. The aristocracy and very rich didn't live in stately homes or anything similar; that was to come later. What we think of as typical Greek architecture was seen in temples and other public buildings – but above all in temples. These structures were glorifications of gods and cities, even if by extension they were also glorifications of those who paid for and built them.

> One thing that didn't survive in the original structures or the later imitations was colour – the Greeks painted buildings

This public character explains one of the peculiarities of the time. Although the Greek countryside was full of people in the classical period – by the standards of the time – it has almost no notable architecture. For the most part, there is only the odd isolated rural temple. By far the greatest number of 'important' or (in our sense) 'typical' buildings were in urban centres.

In fact, as time went on, the centres became increasingly crowded and even jumbled, especially in the more prosperous cities. This raised early town-planning arguments, with some people proposing and putting into practice organised city layouts on a rectangular gridiron pattern, and others arguing that this way of doing things was fundamentally un-Greek. The philosopher Aristotle even argued that sprawling centres and haphazard streets were a good defence against



A copy of the Porch of the Caryatids on the south end of the Erechtheum on the Acropolis, Athens

It wasn't until the 6th century BCE that non-religious public buildings started to be constructed in Ancient Greece invaders, because they were confusing. Given how often the Greek cities were at war, especially with each other, this was no small point. It wasn't until the Hellenistic age, after Alexander the Great's conquests, that regular town planning would come into its own.

All of the early 'prestige' buildings were temples, and throughout the early and classical periods, they would remain pre-eminent. At first, they were largely constructed from wood, rubble and clay. As so often, the Greeks then learned a trick, or rather a lot of tricks, from the Egyptians, and started to use finished stone. This revolutionised Greek architecture, and the template for later building started to be established.

This emphasis on religious buildings accounts for one of the defining features of Greek public architecture. Their temples were not churches, or even cathedrals; they were not meant to be worshipped in. They were quite literally houses for gods. Inside might be the cult statue and past offerings to the god – quite sumptuous treasure, or even the city's financial reserves in some cases – and a few relatively simple rooms. The altar would be outside the temple. Temples were designed to be looked at – from the outside – not actually used.

This might explain why you can call Greek buildings many things – elegant, imposing, magnificent – but not comfortable or lived-in. They are there to strike awe; to be gazed on and admired. This tendency persisted to a large degree with secular public buildings until in the Hellenistic period architects began to also give the neglected interiors their full attention.

Greek architectural styles are traditionally split into three 'orders': Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. The Doric order was developed in the Peloponnese peninsula in southern mainland Greece in the 7th century BCE. The Ionic order followed in the next century, and originated east of the Aegean Sea, while the Corinthian order is essentially a later offshoot of the Ionic, and didn't become important until the Roman period.

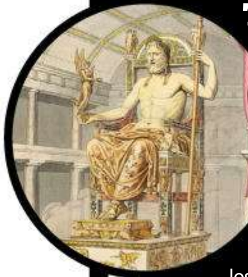
In technical terms, 'orders' were arrangements of types of columns to support the entablature, the upper part of a building

"Their temples were not churches; they were not meant to be worshipped in. They were quite literally houses for gods"

The temple of Apollo at Corinth. It was built around 540 BCE, making these some of the older standing ruins in Greece

The Greek wonders of the world

Awe-inspiring architecture, from striking statues to impressive temples



The Statue of Zeus at Olympia

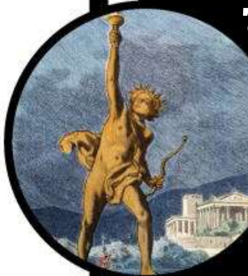
This 12-metre-high statue of Zeus was the work of Phidias. Zeus's skin was made from ivory, and his robes from hammered gold. With the advent of Christianity, however, the temple fell into neglect and, having survived an earthquake, the statue was finally lost forever – possibly to fire.

The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus

Constructed over 120 years in what is now Turkey, the temple was completed in 550 BCE. In 356 BCE, Herostratus burned it to the ground, saying that by destroying it he would earn everlasting fame. It was twice rebuilt, but destroyed forever in 401 CE.

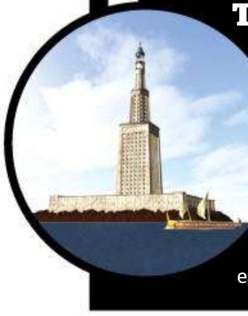
The Mausoleum of Halicarnassus

The tomb of Persian satrap Mausolus is in Halicarnassus, birthplace of Herodotus. Halicarnassus was in Persian-occupied Asia Minor, and is now the city of Bodrum in Turkey. After Mausolus died in 353 BCE, his wife commissioned the tomb. She joined him in it when she died.



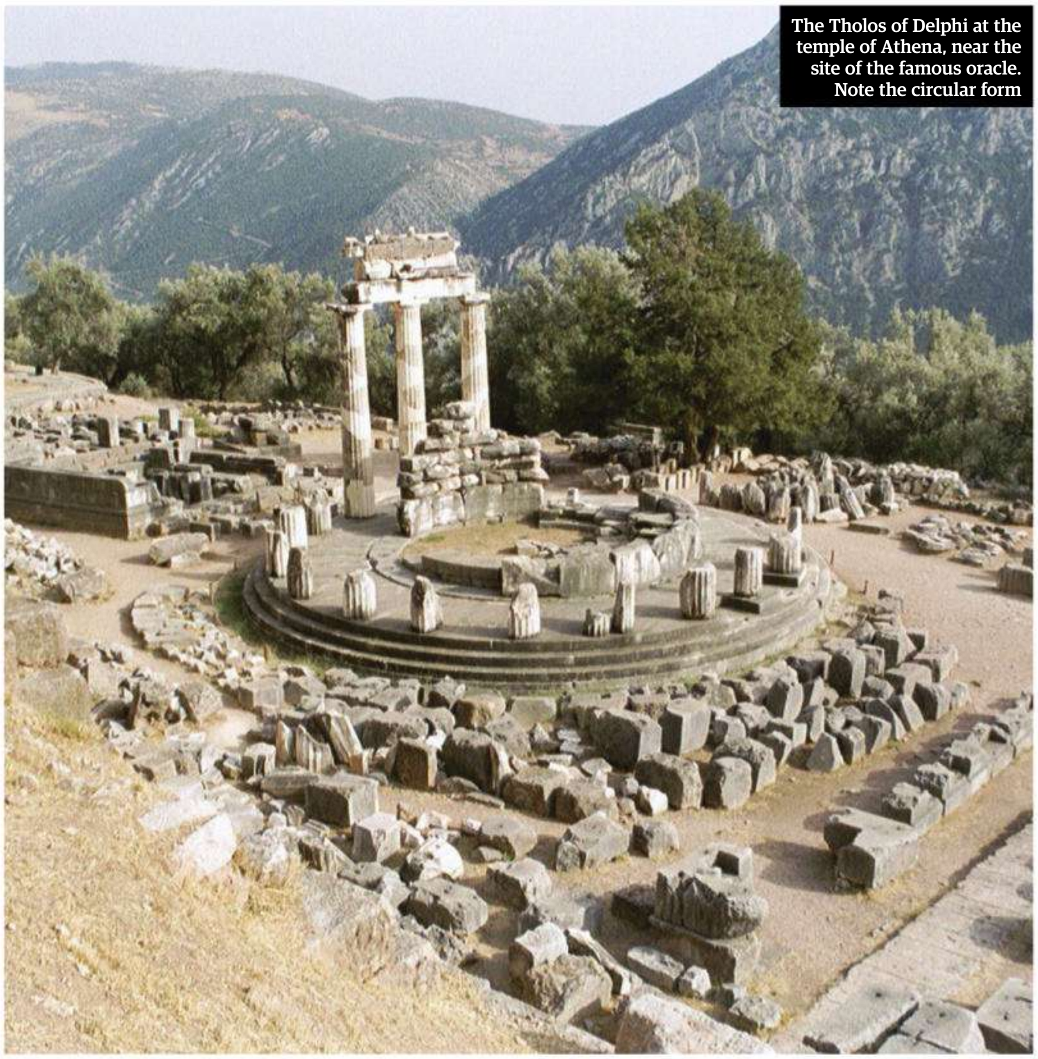
The Colossus of Rhodes

The island of Rhodes built a 34-metre-high statue of its patron, Helios, god of the Sun, from 292–280 BCE to mark its victory over an invading army. Melted-down bronze and iron from the weapons of the defeated were used extensively in the construction of it.



The Lighthouse of Alexandria

Sometimes called the Pharos (it was built on the island of Pharos), the lighthouse was almost 140 metres high. Its mirror reflected sunlight by day and firelight by night. Built by Ptolemy I Soter around 280 BCE, it was damaged in several earthquakes, and by 1480 it had gone.


The Tholos of Delphi at the temple of Athena, near the site of the famous oracle. Note the circular form

Doric, the earliest and most popular order, was especially important in mainland Greece and the western colonies. It was also a transitional style of sorts, taking the old wooden architecture and remaking it with stone. Ionic was a lighter, more elaborate and decorative style, with Corinthian being a further development of this trend.

One of the remarkable features of classical architecture was its consistency over the Greek world, spread as it was over the mainland and islands, Asia Minor, Sicily and mainland Italy, and Spain. A citizen from Syracuse in Greek Sicily could travel to Corinth and in the Peloponnese, and find a familiar style of public buildings. Leading architects and sculptors – who were closely involved in architecture, with sculptures and friezes being an integral part of public buildings – travelled widely and freely between cities. There was a great deal of variation and individuality in the details, but the essential style was coherent. This was to change somewhat in the Hellenistic period, when the focus switched from community to individual.

Doric columns were relatively simple and didn't have bases, unlike the Ionic and Corinthian ones

The historical and cultural context obviously played a great part in the development of architecture. The classical period was above all the public period, where great buildings were temples or civic structures in the agora. There were great theatres and sports stadiums. Nowhere was this more true than in mighty, rich and democratic Athens. In the west, buildings might still be the pet projects of individual rulers – of tyrants – but for the most part, they were truly public.

Later, after Alexander's conquests, the re-establishment of monarchy in the Greek world, and close contact with the east, this changed, and the emphasis shifted from the public to the individual. There was greater diversity of building types and styles. Nonetheless, the results were still unquestionably recognisable as 'Greek'.

The most obvious legacy was seen in Rome. The Romans absorbed, learned from and expanded the architectural principles of the Greeks. Their superior engineering skill – and perhaps confidence – saw them employing arches, vaults and domes, which the Greeks mostly avoided, and otherwise extending the range of what was possible. They paid much more attention to private buildings, to villas and palaces and stately living. Their vast empire spread their architecture – and ultimately the Greek legacy – even further.

The legacy isn't only physical, of course. Greek architectural principles were the very foundation for later Western theory and practice, in particular for public architecture. And every time we take a seat in a stadium or theatre, we are sitting in a Greek invention.

The new and improved Acropolis

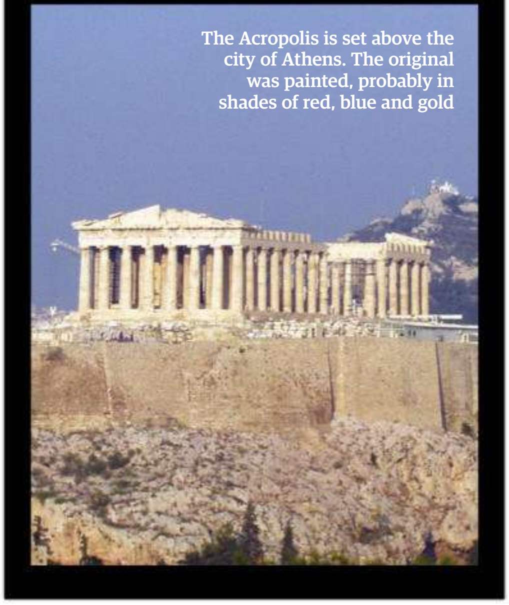
The original Acropolis buildings were destroyed by the Persians in 480 BCE, and the new buildings – constructed in the second half of the 5th century – were a statement of civic pride. The Acropolis was a public space, built by and for the Athenian people. Previously, undertakings of this magnitude had been the preserve of great kings and emperors.

The Parthenon temple of the goddess Athena on the Acropolis was unprecedentedly vast, and built entirely from marble — 22,000 tons of it. Its size allowed for many new features.

One of the most notable aspects of the new Acropolis was the blending of the Doric and Ionic orders. The Parthenon was essentially Doric, but with an Ionic frieze, while the Erechtheum – a temple for multiple cults – was Ionic. The Propylaea (gateway) contains columns from both orders.

It is often said that the Acropolis and the three major buildings it contained are – individually and collectively – the culmination and high point of the classical tradition. They blend tradition and innovation in subtly balanced precision, with extraordinary attention given to every detail.

It was a bold statement by the Athenian democracy, made possible by the wealth she was garnering from her empire, and the confidence she had gained from her success in the Persian wars.


The Acropolis is set above the city of Athens. The original was painted, probably in shades of red, blue and gold

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Greek temples

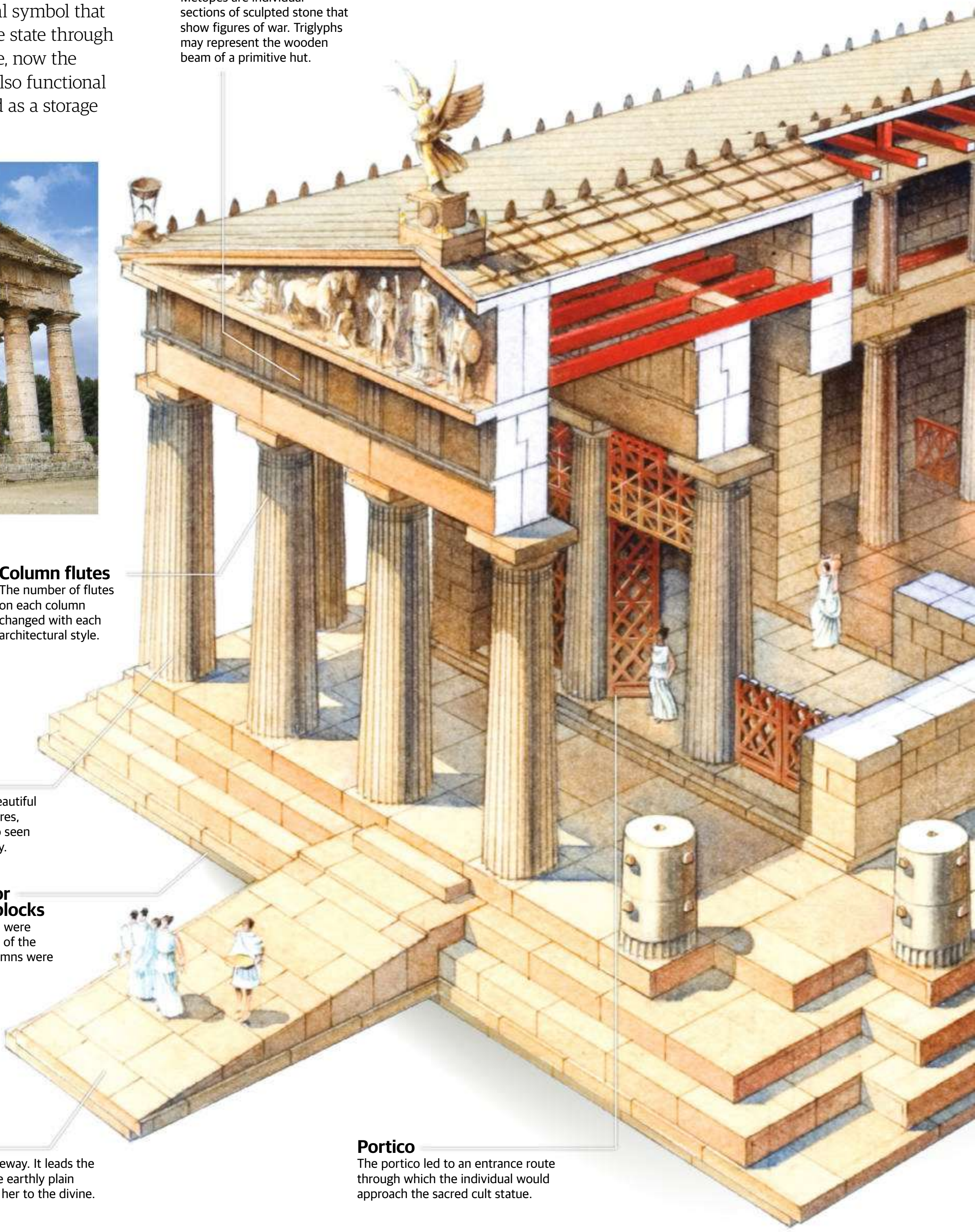
Inside these multi-use architectural marvels

The temple acted as a cosmic generator. It was regarded as a dwelling designed for the gods and was also seen as a reception area for prayer, magical petition and divination. It also became a political symbol that emphasised the might and power of the state through ancient architectural achievement. The temple, now the most famous symbol of ancient Greece, was also functional – it housed important official offices and acted as a storage centre and a treasury.

The Doric temple of Segesta

THE PARTHENON

Location:
Athenian Acropolis, Greece
Length of construction:
447 BC – 438 BC
Designer: Phidias
Type of building/purpose:
Temple and treasury
Type of architecture:
Classical – Doric
Cost of construction:
In modern terms, it is estimated that the Parthenon cost over £3 million
Architects:
Ictinos and Callicrates
Area coverage: 69.5m x 30.9m



Metopes and triglyphs
Metopes are individual sections of sculpted stone that show figures of war. Triglyphs may represent the wooden beam of a primitive hut.

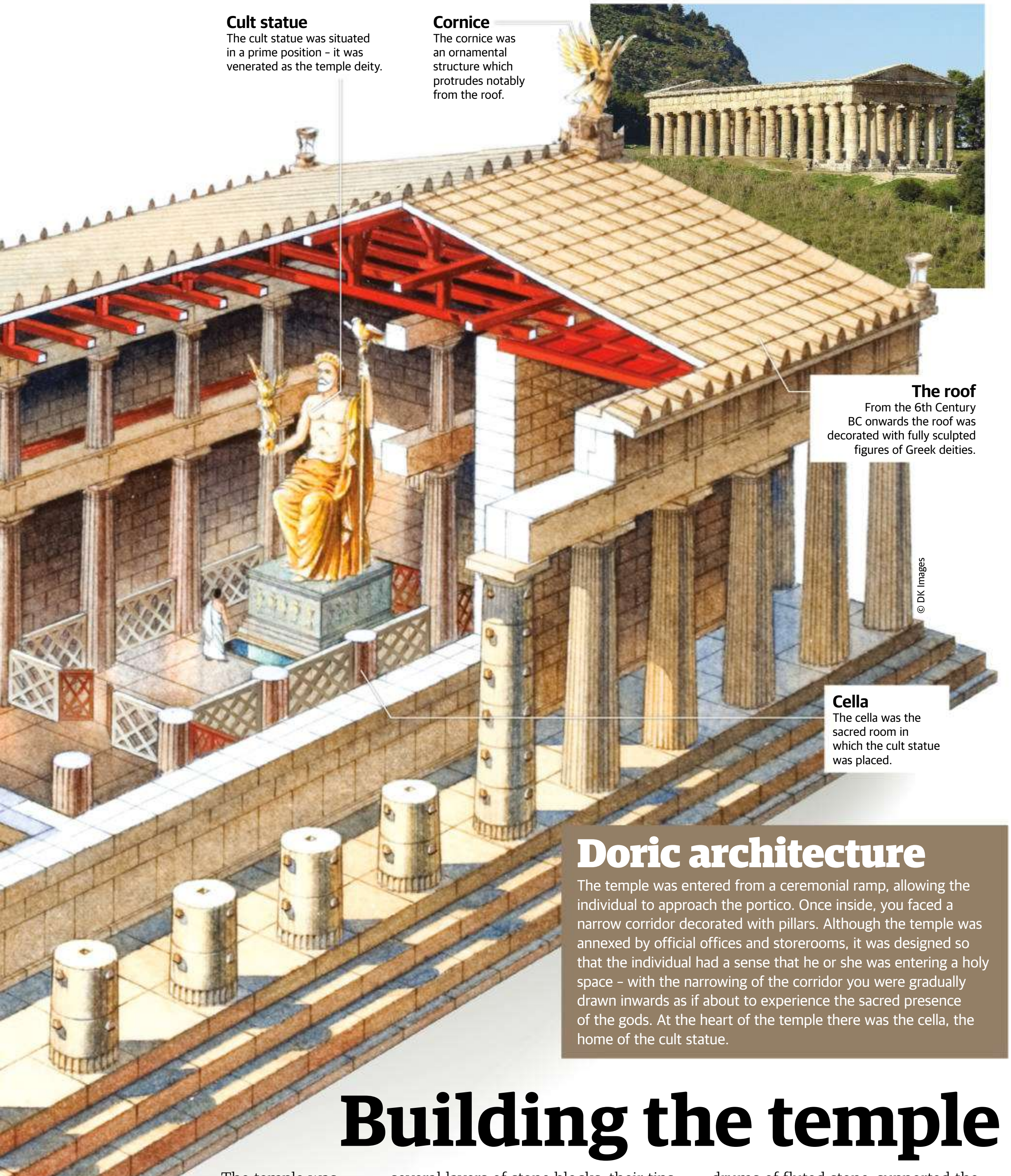
Column flutes
The number of flutes on each column changed with each architectural style.

Columns
Valued for their beautiful architectural features, columns were also seen as pillars of the sky.

Stereobate or foundation blocks
Foundation blocks were placed at the base of the temple. Doric columns were directly built upon the stereobate.

The ramp
A ceremonial causeway. It leads the individual from the earthly plain and guides him or her to the divine.

Portico
The portico led to an entrance route through which the individual would approach the sacred cult statue.



Cult statue
The cult statue was situated in a prime position – it was venerated as the temple deity.

Cornice
The cornice was an ornamental structure which protrudes notably from the roof.

The roof
From the 6th Century BC onwards the roof was decorated with fully sculpted figures of Greek deities.

Cella
The cella was the sacred room in which the cult statue was placed.

© DK Images

Doric architecture

The temple was entered from a ceremonial ramp, allowing the individual to approach the portico. Once inside, you faced a narrow corridor decorated with pillars. Although the temple was annexed by official offices and storerooms, it was designed so that the individual had a sense that he or she was entering a holy space – with the narrowing of the corridor you were gradually drawn inwards as if about to experience the sacred presence of the gods. At the heart of the temple there was the cella, the home of the cult statue.

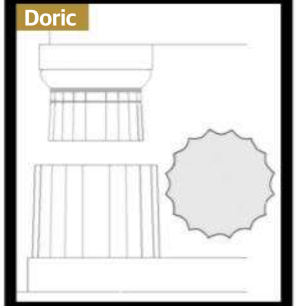
Building the temple

The temple was viewed not only as an edifice of marble, wood and stone, but a magical structure that was designed on astronomical principles. With this in mind, early construction began with the foundation ceremony, creating a base that is known as a stereobate. This consisted of several layers of stone blocks, their tips protruding above ground.

The workers employed simple tools of bronze and copper. During construction they also used mallets, chisels and ropes to create a further foundation block called a crepidoma, which acted as a base for the columns and walls. The columns, which were made of several drums of fluted stone, supported the entablature, which consisted of the architrave and the frieze which lay below the cornice. Temple construction could take over a decade, the building often covered 115m x 55m of land and boasted columns that reached 15m to 20m in height. On completion, the temple was decorated by craftsmen.

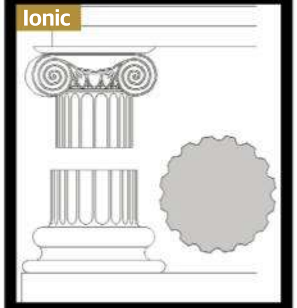
How to identify Greek columns

Doric



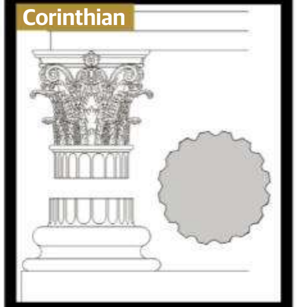
These columns are short, heavy structures with plain capitals. They have no base and their height measures four to eight times their diameter. They are decorated with 20 flutes. The base of the column was placed directly on the stylobate (or foundation stone).

Ionic

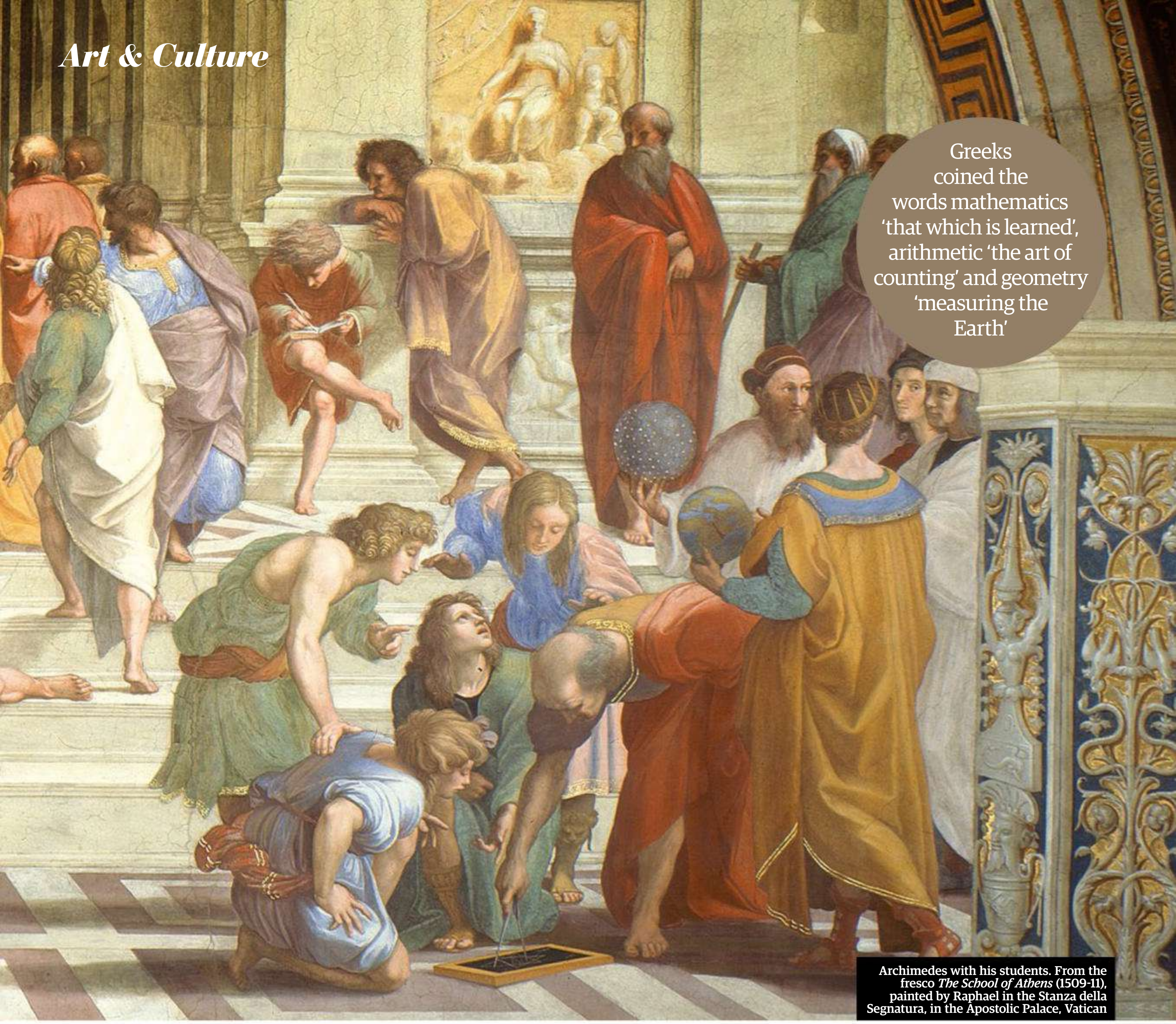


Ionic columns are graceful and slender – they differ from the Doric in that they are designed with a large base for extra support. They are easily distinguished by their large scrolled features. The Ionic column has 24 flutes.

Corinthian



The Corinthian column is ornate and elaborate, and is often more appealing than the Doric and Ionic columns described above. The column is tall and slim. Designed with 24 flutes it is crafted with a scrumptious capital, which is sculpted with scrolls and acanthus leaves.

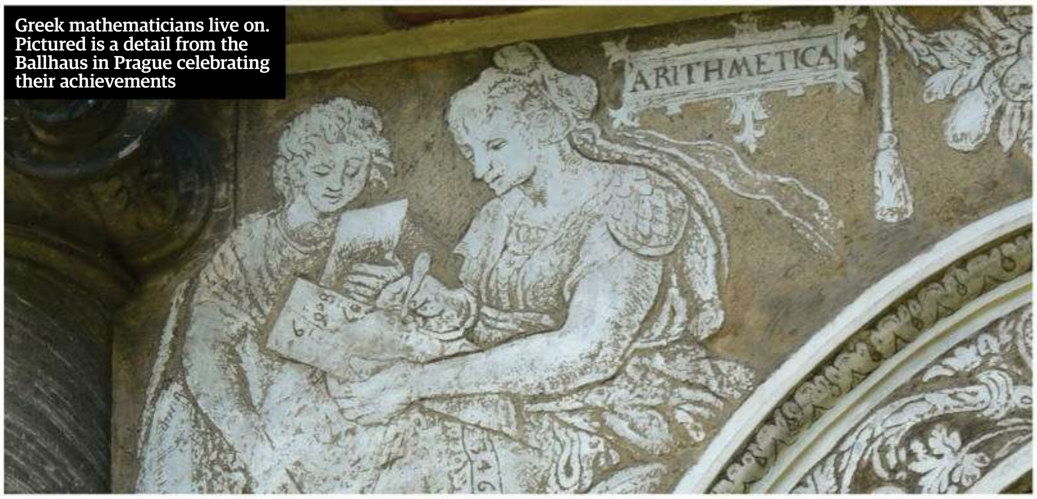


Greeks coined the words mathematics 'that which is learned', arithmetic 'the art of counting' and geometry 'measuring the Earth'

Archimedes with his students. From the fresco *The School of Athens* (1509-11), painted by Raphael in the Stanza della Segnatura, in the Apostolic Palace, Vatican

The great Greek maths revolution

From Pythagoras through Euclid to Archimedes, the Greeks laid the foundations for mathematics as we know it. Without them, modern science wouldn't exist



Greek mathematicians live on. Pictured is a detail from the Ballhaus in Prague celebrating their achievements

The Greeks may not have been the first mathematical pioneers – they almost certainly learned their first formal maths from the Egyptians and Mesopotamians – but they were unquestionably the greatest mathematicians of the ancient world.

Everyone has heard of Pythagoras' theorem, which is still a staple of school maths. Most of us have heard of Euclid and Euclidean geometry, even if we're vague about who he is and what that is. Then there's Thales' theorem – also fundamental, if probably less well known. Although Pi had already been calculated approximately, the first mathematician known to have calculated it rigorously was Archimedes, around 250 BCE.

These achievements, however, don't express the magnitude of the Greeks' influence on mathematics. Their legacy is not really one of triumphant achievements, of questions answered and conundrums solved, but rather one of working out what the right questions were to ask and then developing an original method to answer them. As it turned out, some of the questions are actually impossible to answer, but discovering this was just as fruitful in its way as coming up with solutions.

The three classical geometric problems from antiquity – squaring the circle, duplicating the cube and trisection of an angle using only a compass and straightedge – were all formulated and explored by Greek mathematicians. All of them have now been proved to be insoluble using Greek tools. In the thousands of years it took to do this – their impossibility was only proved in the 1800s – numerous incidental discoveries were made, while analytical techniques were refined. It could be argued that these problems were just as important as the questions that were answered.

The approach developed by the Greeks was their greatest gift to mathematics. If other ancient cultures had a tradition of serious mathematical study, no one studied it quite like they did.

The much older Egyptian and Mesopotamian practices revolved around 'rule of thumb' calculations based on observations. So, for example, Egyptian land surveyors used a rope formed into a triangle to obtain right angles, and from this they knew roughly what Pythagoras did about right-angled triangles – in Pythagorean terms, the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. The difference is that they observed it, but he deduced it. He proved it, showing that right-angled triangles were so, and that they had to be so, and would always be so. This is what we call mathematical technique.

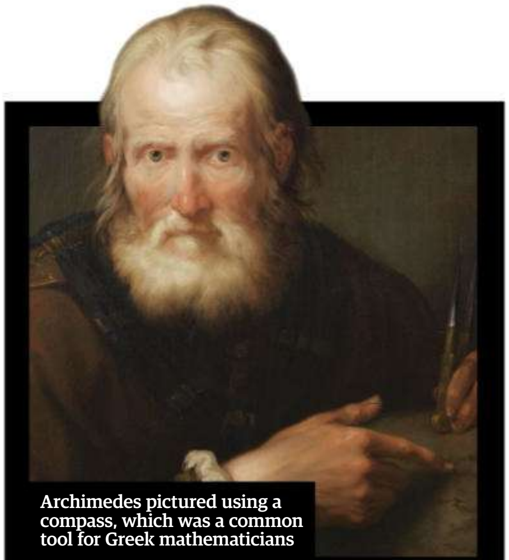
The Egyptians were happy to approximate Pi. For their practical purposes, it was enough. Whereas for the Greeks, it wasn't. They wanted the most precise definition of Pi that could be obtained. This illustrates another facet of the unique Greek approach, the view that maths could, and should, be something you pursue for its own sake, not just to measure building blocks for pyramids or make astronomical calculations.

You could argue that the real contribution of the Greeks lies in three key areas. First, they made maths abstract. They viewed the physical features of maths problems as incidental and of no or secondary importance. Second, they generalised. They didn't just want to know what happened in a specific instance, they wanted to uncover the general principles that explained the rules – and that could be used to deduce new rules from those principles. Thirdly, there was deductive reasoning itself. Mathematical arguments should start from true statements and then work through their logical implications. Maths should work by proofs, and these proofs should be as rigorous as possible. These three principles, combined with a new accuracy of calculation, revolutionised maths and left a powerful and enduring legacy.

Regarding basic maths, *Euclid's Elements* was still the basis for geometry textbooks in Victorian Britain's schools. Although Euclid is now seen to be in some ways limited, we still talk about Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry. Beyond this, the Greeks had shown that maths wasn't just a matter of dry and predictable arithmetic, but in fact could be flexible and even astonishing. We have moved on from Ancient Greek mathematics, but the European pioneers of modern maths from the 16th century onwards founded their work on Greek discoveries and techniques. Mathematicians, scientists and philosophers all returned to the old texts. Figures as notable and diverse as René Descartes, Christiaan Huygens and Isaac Newton all made explicit use of Greek maths. Nor should we forget that the Greek texts were also read by the great medieval Arab mathematicians.

Modern science – and the modern world as it stands – couldn't exist without the Greek mathematical revolution.

> The Greeks said that the Egyptians invented geometry and that Thales – one of the 'Seven Sages' – introduced it to Greece



Archimedes pictured using a compass, which was a common tool for Greek mathematicians

The incomparable Archimedes

Archimedes was not only a great mathematician and inventor, he was one of the most fascinating and eclectic characters of the ancient world. He is also a true historical figure, unlike the semi-mythical Pythagoras, even if some of the many stories about him do seem too good to be true. He probably didn't actually leap from the bath after he solved a problem, running through the streets naked shouting 'Eureka!' ('I have found it!').

In outside mathematical circles we're often most interested in his supposed quirks and ingenious inventions – including war-making devices to thwart the mighty Romans, who were besieging his home city of Syracuse – there was no doubt that he was first and foremost a mathematician.

It's said that Archimedes didn't think enough of his practical work to put it into books, and indeed none of the nine surviving treatises include them. He was so proud of his work in *On the Sphere and Cylinder*, however, that he asked for a sphere inscribed in a cylinder to be added to his tomb.

Archimedes was killed by a Roman soldier during the sack of Syracuse. Legend had it that it was because he refused to leave his mathematical diagrams, which may not be true, but tells you something about what people thought he was like.

WAR & EMPIRE

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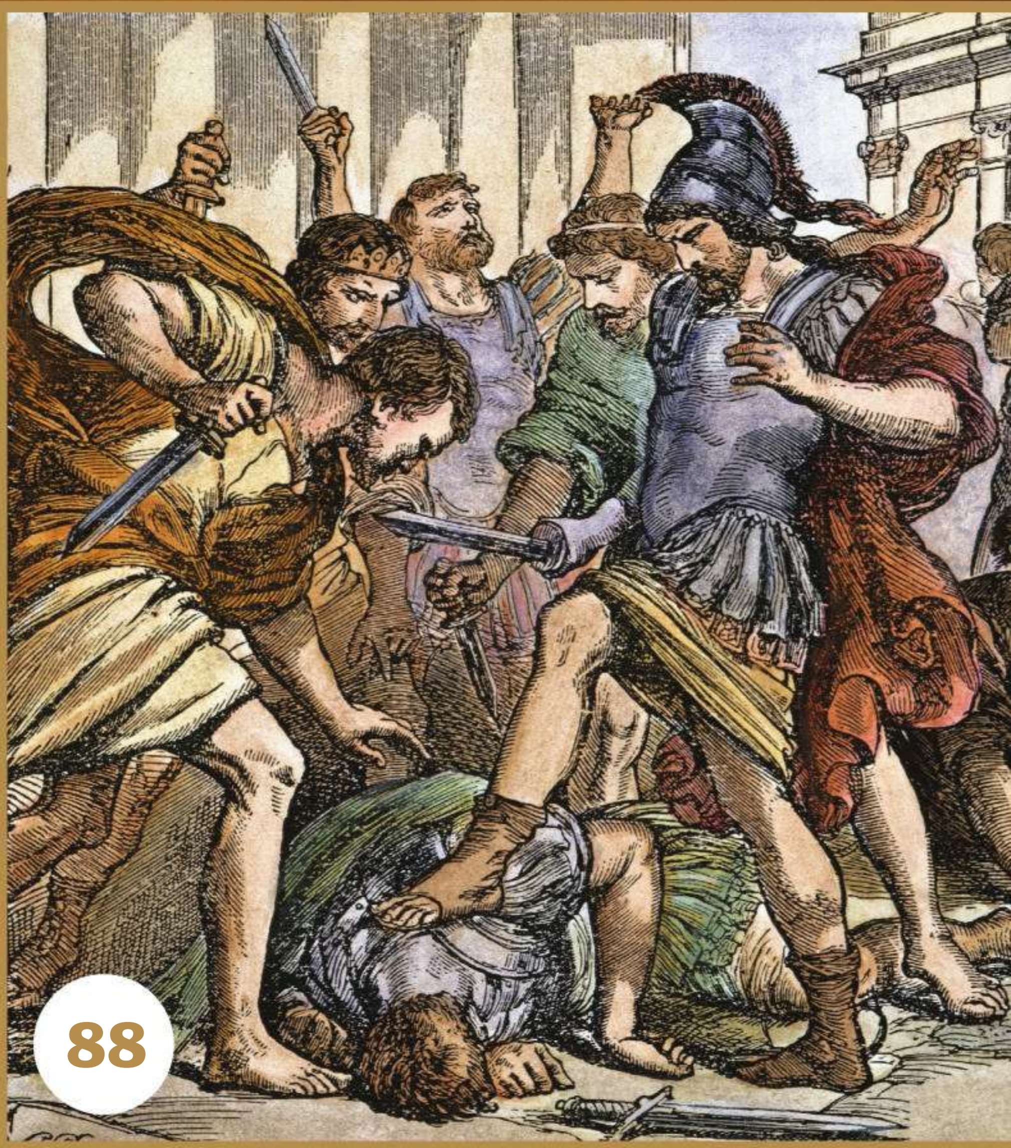
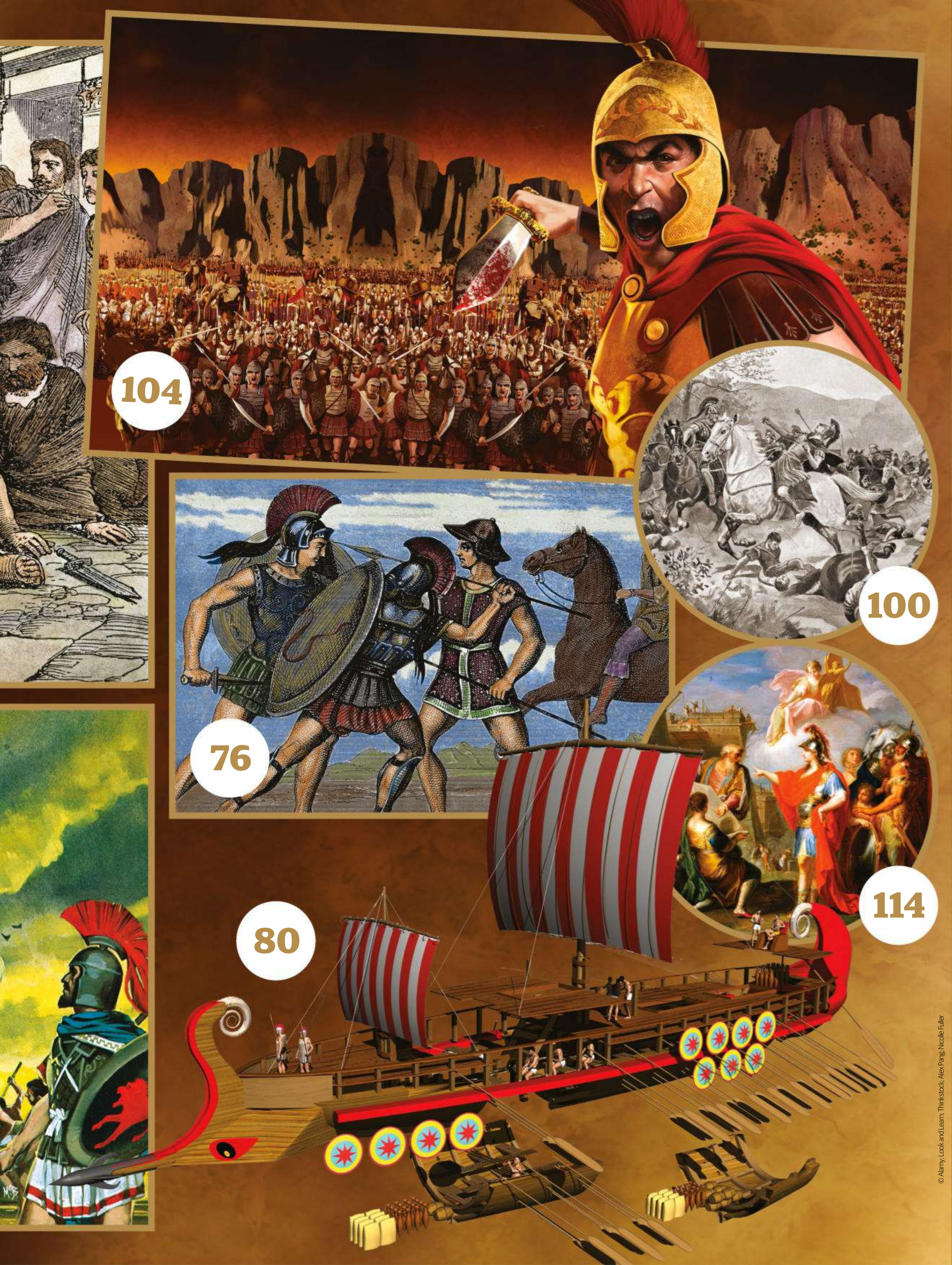
> "Alexander's death left a power vacuum that would lead to the Roman conquest of Greece"

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The way of the warrior

War and the prospects of war were integral components of the Ancient Greek way of life, shaping the societies of the city-states and beyond

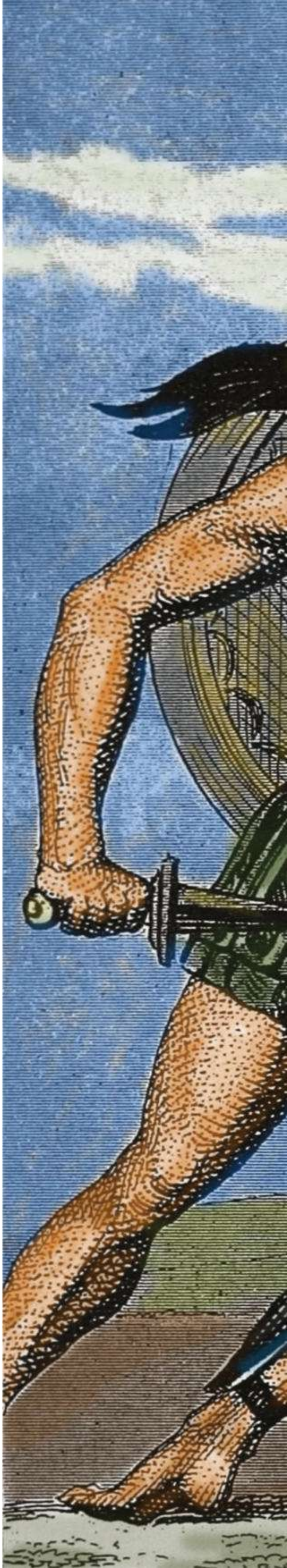
Legend is an intriguing concoction of tradition, belief, myth, fact and fiction, and that of the Trojan War cast a long shadow across Ancient Greek society. The great conflict, which survives through *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* of the poet Homer, was said to have occurred during the Mycenaean period around the 13th century BCE, only to be followed by three centuries of discord, invasion and the breakdown of civilisation – an ancient Dark Age.

During the 7th century BCE, the emergence of the Greek city-states did not herald a new nation. Rather, the city-states shared something of a common heritage rooted in conflict, alliance, empire and honour, but existed more or less independent of one another. At any given time, there were many 'Greek' city-states that fought among themselves and also as allies. As Greek civilisation flourished, colonies were established across the Mediterranean Basin, particularly in Asia Minor, North Africa, Sicily and Southern Italy.

The revival of trade and prosperity among the most prominent city-states fostered the development of military formations. The principal city-states of Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Corinth, Megara, Argos, Syracuse and others organised armies that would become the instruments of decision in matters involving territorial disputes, trade domination, honour and even threats to freedom and independence. During the Archaic period, approximately 800 to 500 BCE, and the Classical period, 500 to 336 BCE, armies evolved from bands of armed warriors often led by an individual chieftain to militias of citizen soldiers under the control of the state, and then in some cases to standing, professional armies.

From the Archaic period forward, Greek armed forces fought in conflicts both large and small. These included the Persian invasion led by King Darius, which concluded with the decisive Greek victory at Marathon in 490 BCE; the Greek victory during the sea battle of Salamis, and the heroic stand at Thermopylae, which thwarted a second Persian invasion under Xerxes – the son of Darius – in 480 BCE; the Peloponnesian War from 431 to 404 BCE, which sapped the strength of the city-states, but left Sparta preeminent; the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE, which confirmed the ascendancy of King Philip II of Macedonia; and the wave of victories recorded by Alexander the Great. At the beginning of the Hellenistic period, around 300 BCE, Alexander's military ventures led to the conquest of much of the known world, from Egypt and the Mediterranean, right across Persia and the Indian subcontinent.

Seafaring city-states such as Rhodes, Corinth and Aegina built powerful navies, primarily of warships called triremes



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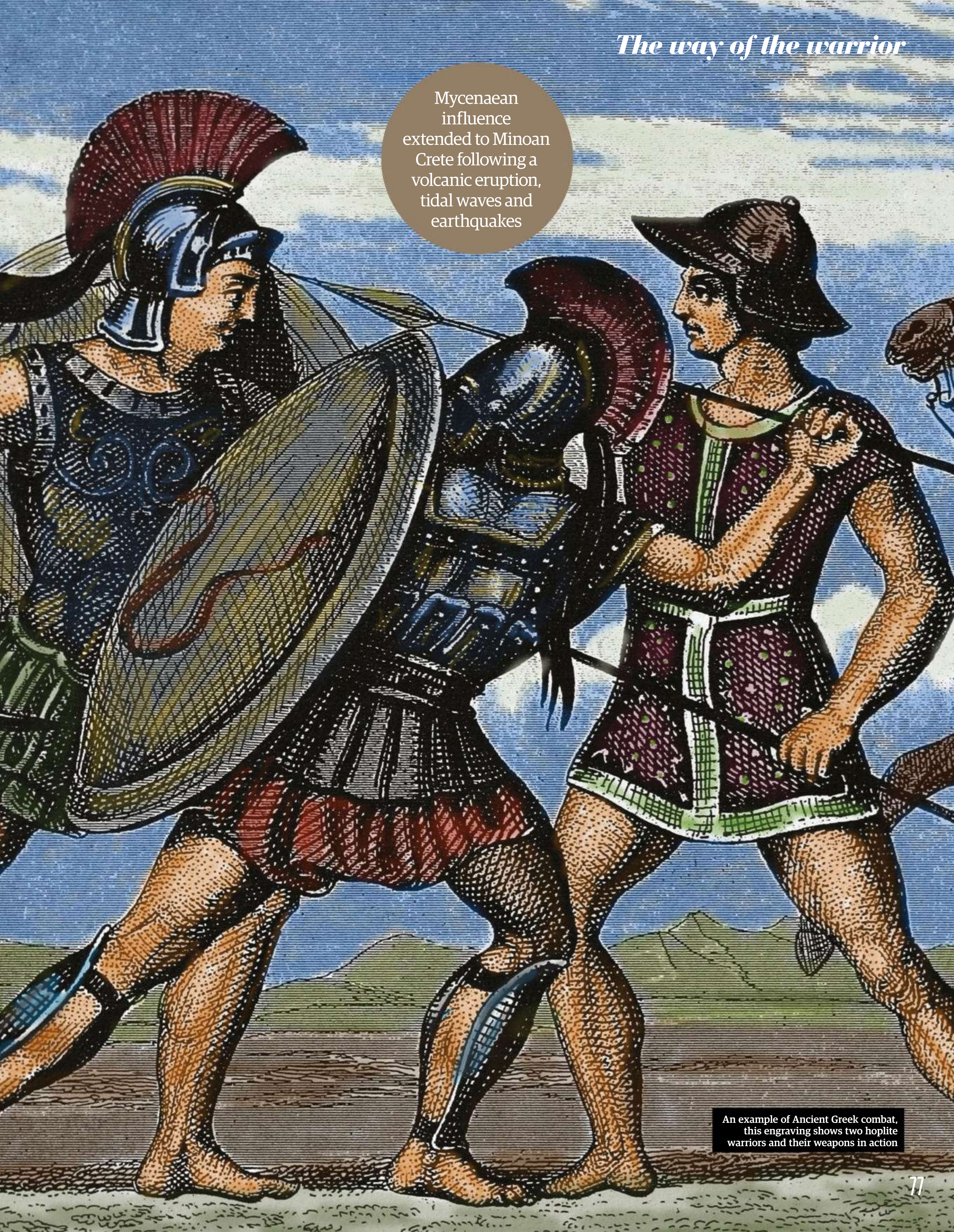


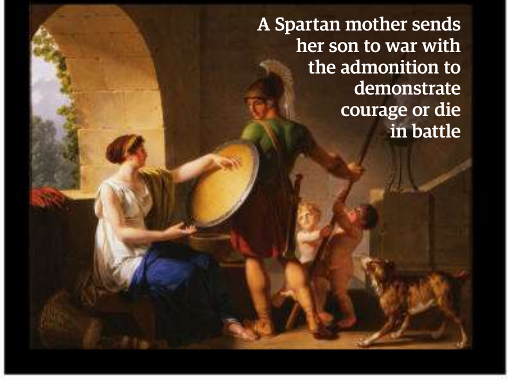
Mycenaean influence extended to Minoan Crete following a volcanic eruption, tidal waves and earthquakes

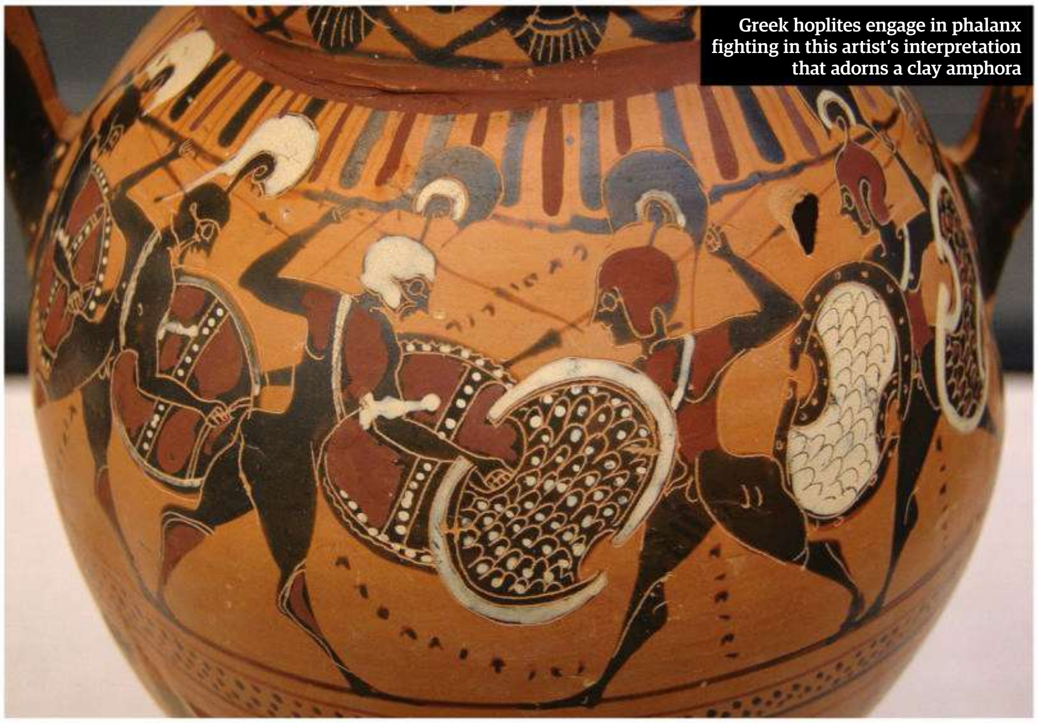
An example of Ancient Greek combat, this engraving shows two hoplite warriors and their weapons in action

The role Of Spartan women

The Spartan commitment to military might was evident throughout the social structure of the city-state. Because their men were often away fulfilling their commitments to the army, women routinely ran the farms and households of Sparta, directing slaves and supervising domestic operations. Spartan women were allowed to legally own property and inherit estates. They were also more highly educated than women of other Greek city-states. Some Spartan women amassed considerable wealth and influence within the Spartan government, drawing criticism from observers in other city-states that were dominated by men.

For women, raising children – particularly boys, who would one day populate the ranks of the Spartan army – was the highest duty. While free women in other city-states would have routinely performed certain household tasks, these were often considered beneath the dignity of Spartan women, and delegated to the slaves. Spartan women embraced their role in society and took great pride in their contribution to the militaristic culture. One Spartan mother sending her son off to war supposedly told him: "Come back either with your shield or on it!" In other words, only a coward would drop his shield and flee from combat. Death was preferable to the loss of Spartan honour.


A Spartan mother sends her son to war with the admonition to demonstrate courage or die in battle


Greek hoplites engage in phalanx fighting in this artist's interpretation that adorns a clay amphora

"Translated as 'lizard killer', the spike could be driven into the ground for a stout defence, or turned against the enemy"

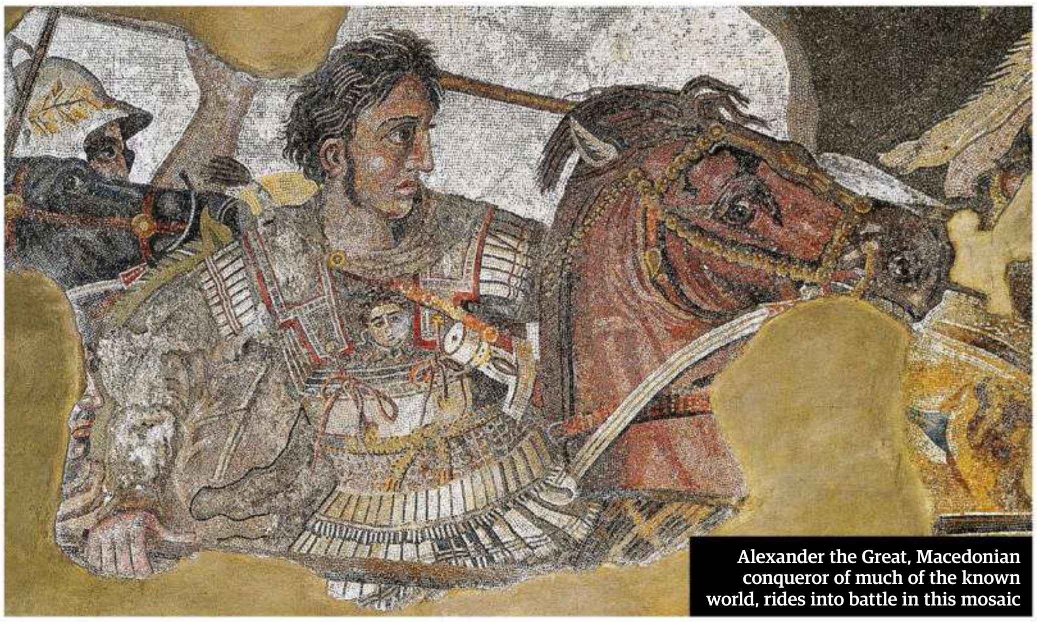
ERA OF THE HOPLITE

The archetypal soldier of Ancient Greece was known as the hoplite, a warrior whose principal vocation was not in fact military. These men were citizens of the wealthy or upper middle classes, merchants or landowners whose participation in the military was either a condition of citizenship or a matter of individual honour. In many cases, military service as a hoplite was reserved for the well-to-do, simply as a matter of cost. Soldiers were required to furnish their own arms and equipment.

The hoplite was typically equipped with at least 30 kilograms of armour, including a chest plate called a cuirass that was strapped onto the body with leather thongs, a tall bronze helmet, and shin guards called greaves that protected the fronts of the legs. His primary protection was a heavy wooden shield called a hoplon that was covered with a bronze veneer. The shield weighed between eight and 15 kilograms, and though it might be considered unwieldy in battle, it was actually quite effective. The hoplite could rest a portion of the shield on his shoulder, and its design facilitated the development of the phalanx, the principal Ancient Greek fighting formation.

The primary hoplite weapon was an iron-tipped spear called a doru, extending a length of nearly three metres. The shaft of the spear was wooden, and an iron spike was affixed to the butt. Called the sauroter, literally translated as 'lizard killer', the spike could be driven into the ground for a stout defence, or turned against the enemy during hand-to-hand combat. For close-in fighting, the hoplite was also armed with a secondary weapon, a short sword called a xiphos with a curved, double-edged, leaf-shaped blade about 65 centimetres long. The surissa, a longer spear extending up to five metres, was introduced with Macedonian troops under Alexander the Great during the 4th century BCE.

The primary fighting formation of the Greeks, the phalanx, was typically eight hoplites deep with


Alexander the Great, Macedonian conqueror of much of the known world, rides into battle in this mosaic

a broad front that might include 100 or more men. The soldiers locked their shields together to present an armoured front, and thrust their spears forward. As phalanxes collided, the rear ranks exerted forward pressure. When one phalanx ruptured, its hoplites usually fled the field.

Ancient Greek armies also included cavalry contingents, although the cost of horses and armour again limited their numbers to the wealthy and noble. During the Peloponnesian War, cavalry began to play a more prominent role, but the phalanx remained the decisive formation on the battlefield. Light infantrymen called psiloi supported the hoplites. Armed with javelins, slings and stones, they carried baggage while on the march. Archers were few in number.

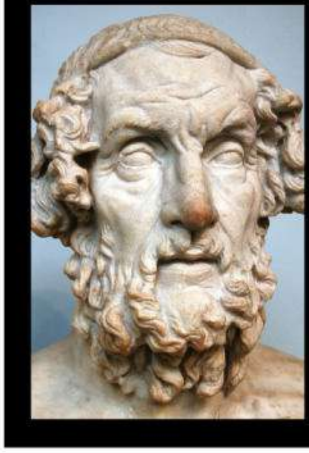
Later, the Macedonian armies of King Philip II and Alexander the Great implemented cavalry more fully into battle tactics, recognising its value in scouting and reconnaissance, rapid envelopment of enemy flanks, and pursuit. The revised tactics initiated with the Macedonian army eventually ended the era of the hoplite.

> Spartan soldiers wore red capes into battle, so that bloodstains from wounds would not be readily apparent to others

The enigma of Homer

Some scholars doubt that blind poet Homer, author of the epic *The Iliad* (a tale of the ten-year siege of Troy and the Greek victory in the Trojan War), along with *The Odyssey* (the story of the arduous journey of Odysseus – King of Ithaca – from Troy to his home in the Greek isles) actually even existed. Although there is agreement that the two monumental works, which also shaped the Ancient Greek perspective on the world, were written some time in the 7th or 8th century BCE, other aspects of their creation remain topics of lively debate.

Speculation on the life of Homer asserts that he was born in Ionia, a settlement in what is now Turkey. At the same time, some academics assert that the terms 'Homer' or 'Homeric' actually describe an era in Greek literature rather than an individual. Therefore, it follows that some observers believe Homer was truly a poet who lived and penned *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* on his own. Others say that both poems are the result of the contributions of more than one individual that matured over time. Regardless, the influence of both works resonated for many centuries in Ancient Greece, and is still very potent today.



ATHENS AND SPARTA

Most Ancient Greeks regarded warfare as a necessary element of existence, and prepared their citizenry for the task of meeting any emerging threat. The primary city-states known to history are Athens and Sparta. Both committed to a strong military, however, Sparta is remembered for raising one of the earliest professional armies inculcated with martial spirit and unsurpassed courage.

By the time of the second Persian invasion under Xerxes, Athenian politician and military commander Themistocles had advocated the building of 200 warships known as triremes. It was this strong Athenian navy that saved the day at Salamis.

Military service in Athens was largely dictated by a man's social position and wealth. During the 6th century BCE, Solon – a prominent statesman and lawmaker – instituted four social classes with direct bearing on the type of military service that an Athenian individual was expected to render. The lowest class, the thetes, served as oarsmen aboard the naval triremes, or as light infantry, while the zeugitai were financially able to outfit themselves as hoplites. Above these classes were the hippeis, those who could afford horses and therefore served as cavalry. The wealthiest class, the pentakosiomedimnoi, were military governors or high-level battlefield commanders.

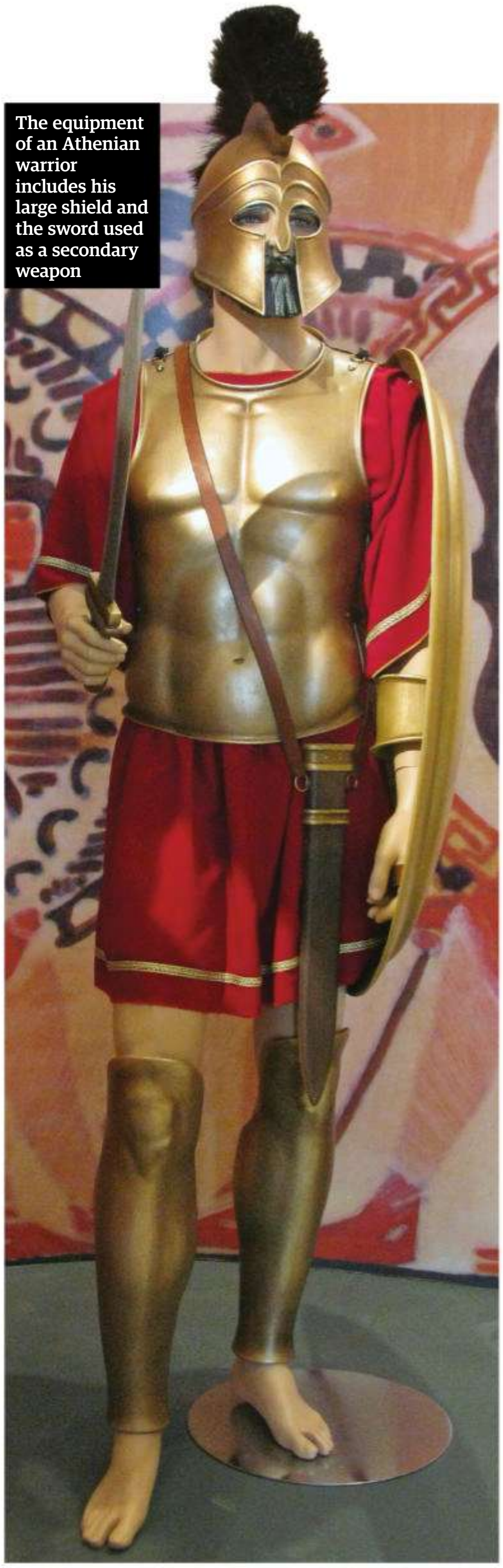
In Sparta, military prowess pervaded society. Baby boys born with any type of deformity were typically abandoned to die, a practice that was also initially common in Athens. At the age of seven, boys left home for the agoge, the demanding military and educational training programme required of all Spartan males. The agoge is said to have included exercises in extreme physical fitness, stealth, proficiency with weapons, and the ability to read and write to facilitate battlefield operations. Those who completed the agoge prior to the age of 30 were considered full citizens of Sparta. Participation in the military was obligatory for males up to the age of 60.

The core of the Spartan army consisted of the Spartiates, full citizens who were given land grants in compensation for their service. The perioeci included non-citizens generally of working and merchant classes who served in light infantry and support roles during military campaigns. A third group, known as helots, consisted of men of the peasant or serf class who also served in the light infantry role.

IN ALEXANDER'S WAKE

Following the death of Alexander the Great at the age of 32 in 323 BCE, the great territorial dominion of the Macedonians fractured. Alexander's close relatives administered the empire at first, however, high-ranking military commanders then influenced the course of history. Ptolemy took control in Egypt, Seleucus in Asia Minor and the Middle East, and Antigonas in Macedonia and much of Greece.

Meanwhile, the Roman Empire was emerging on the world stage, and beginning to exert influence over Greek colonies and settlements in Southern Italy. As Roman legions fought the Carthaginians under Hannibal in North Africa, Macedonian King Philip V offered support to Carthage. Angered at the gesture, the Romans embarked on a series of wars against the Macedonians, and by the middle of the 2nd century BCE, Greece had become a Roman province.



The equipment of an Athenian warrior includes his large shield and the sword used as a secondary weapon

© Alamy

Greek warships

Triremes – the ultimate fighting machines

First used in the 8th century BC, the trireme was a state-of-the-art military machine. Fast and agile, triremes were designed to exert maximum power during military engagements.

Both the Greeks and the Phoenicians employed these ships for military and trading purposes – its name is derived from its ability to seat three levels of rowers who were positioned on both sides of the vessel. Triremes played an essential role in the Persian wars, becoming an important symbol of Athenian military capability. By the 5th century BC these ships came to dominate the waters around the eastern Mediterranean.

Construction of the triremes began with the hull. Later, the builders added wooden ribs in order to strengthen the vessel, these were reinforced with ropes that were fitted to the keel and stretched tightly over the timber. The ships were built with soft woods – namely pine and fir – while larch was employed for the interior of the vessel, the keel was made of oak.

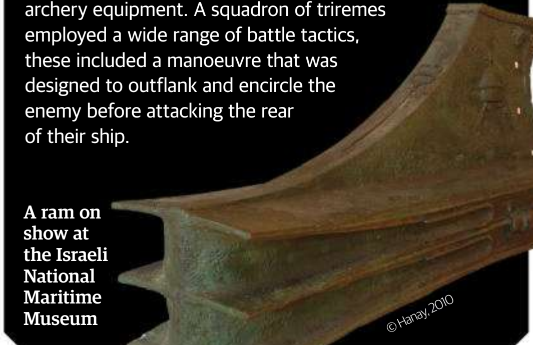
The crew consisted of 200 men, this included rowers, a marine corp (comprising archers and spearmen) and a deck crew who were under the command of the helmsman.

Due to its design the trireme was meant to undertake short, swift operations. At night, the ships would pull into harbour where the crew would be able to collect fresh water and store it for the next stage of the journey.

Primary propulsion came from the oarsmen, this included one man per oar. While the ship was designed with two masts, its steering was controlled by two large paddles that were positioned at the stern. It is believed that the trireme could sail at six to eight knots; the distance it travelled depended on the weather and its manpower. In favourable conditions, it was thought that the oarsmen were able to propel the ship 80 or 96 kilometres over a seven-hour period.

Battle tactics

Athenian military operations depended on their close-quarters battle tactics, namely the ramming and boarding of enemy ships. The ram of the trireme was built at the front of the ship creating a large metal horn. When the ship attacked it would come in from the stern and attempt to rupture the hull of the enemy ship. A small number of marines were placed on the deck of the ship. They would defend or attack, attempting to board the enemy vessel armed with shields, spears and archery equipment. A squadron of triremes employed a wide range of battle tactics, these included a manoeuvre that was designed to outflank and encircle the enemy before attacking the rear of their ship.



A ram on show at the Israeli National Maritime Museum

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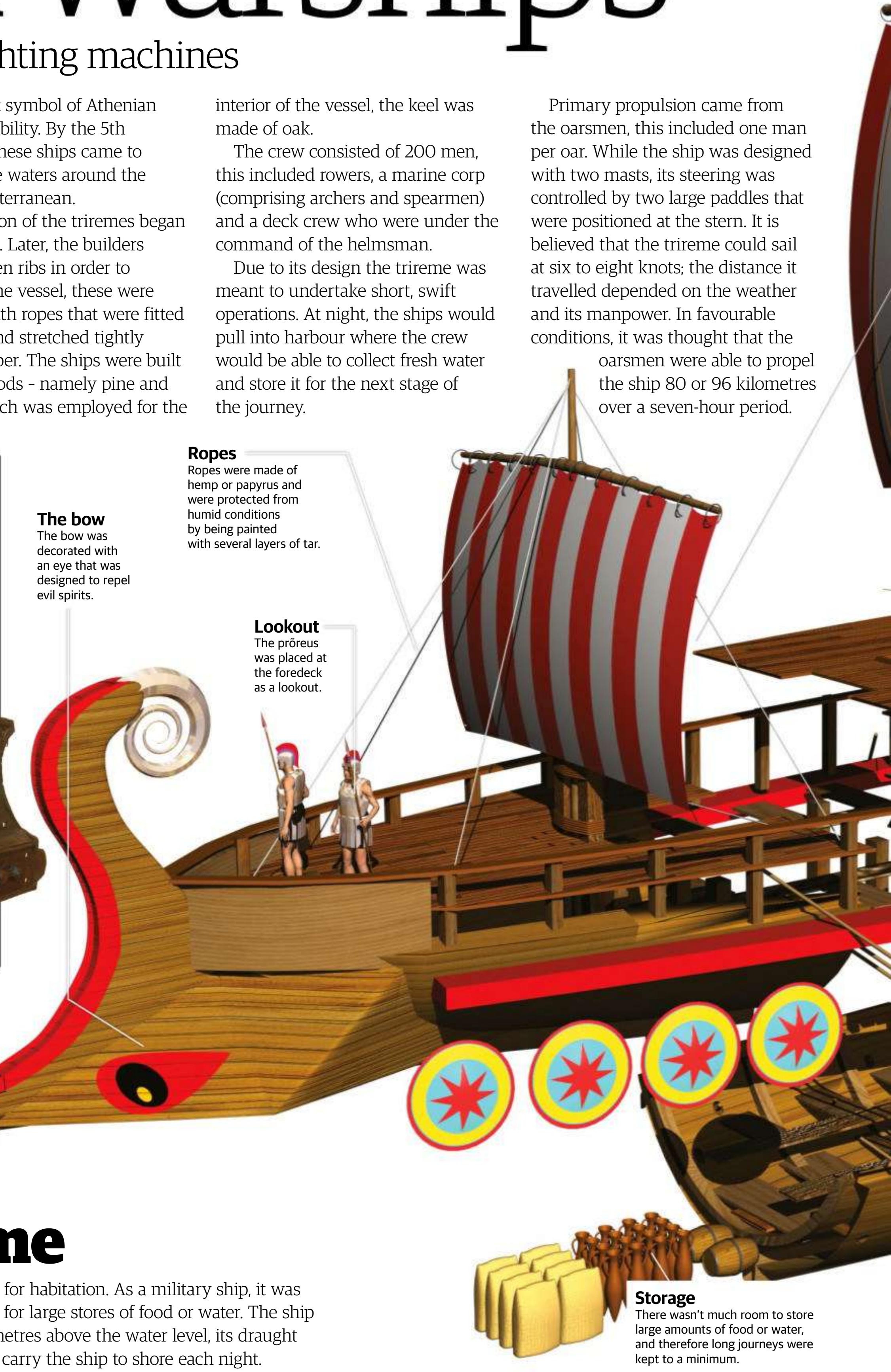

Ropes
Ropes were made of hemp or papyrus and were protected from humid conditions by being painted with several layers of tar.

The bow
The bow was decorated with an eye that was designed to repel evil spirits.

Lookout
The prõreus was placed at the foredeck as a lookout.

The ram
The ram was made of copper or bronze and was designed to rupture enemy vessels.

Inside a trireme

The trireme was a long, narrow vessel highly unsuited for habitation. As a military ship, it was not designed for long journeys and there was no room for large stores of food or water. The ship was designed so the height of the hull rose only two metres above the water level, its draught was shallow and its keel was flat, allowing the crew to carry the ship to shore each night.

Storage
There wasn't much room to store large amounts of food or water, and therefore long journeys were kept to a minimum.

The oarsmen

Rowers consisted not of slaves but of free men and hired foreigners. The oarsmen were divided into three groups. The thranitai occupied the top section of the ship – a position that was relatively comfortable in comparison with conditions below. However, added strength and agility was required of these men. The middle section, who were known as the zygitai, rowed directly beneath the thranitai although at a slightly different angle, while the lowest set of rowers, the thalamitai, were seated in dismal surroundings at the bottom of the ship. The heat here was intense. The oarsmen were particularly vulnerable during enemy engagement and if the rowers were captured, the enemy would dismember their thumbs or cut off their hands. Moreover, if they were trapped below deck during a hostile encounter they risked drowning.

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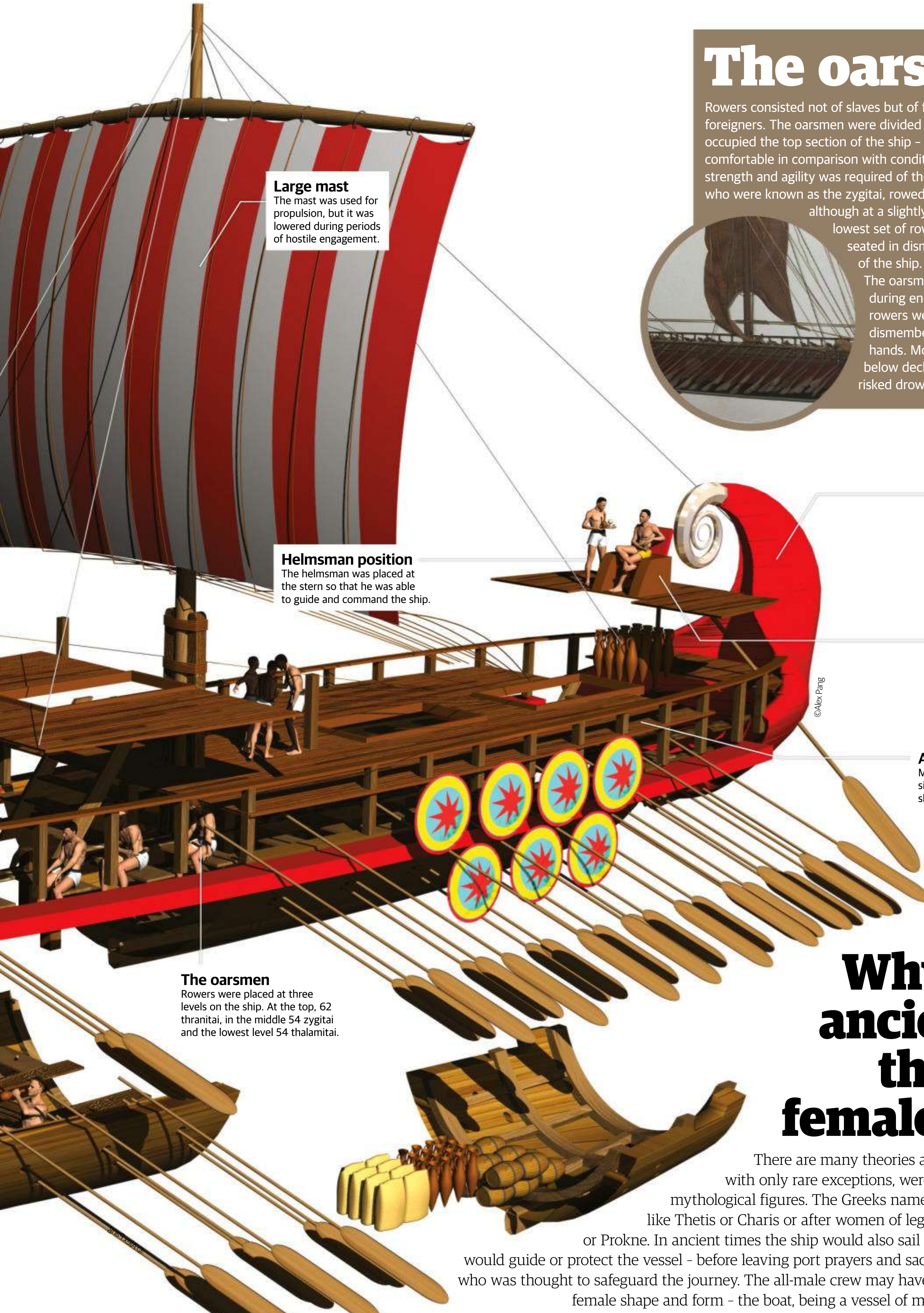


Large mast
The mast was used for propulsion, but it was lowered during periods of hostile engagement.

The akrostolio
To complement the bow, the stern was designed with a tail so that the ship resembled a mythological sea monster.

Helmsman position
The helmsman was placed at the stern so that he was able to guide and command the ship.

Captain's seat
The seat was designed at the rear of the ship for the benefit of the commanding officer.

©Alex Pang

Archers and spearmen
Marines were placed along each side of the vessel to protect the ship during battle.

The oarsmen
Rowers were placed at three levels on the ship. At the top, 62 thranitai, in the middle 54 zygitai and the lowest level 54 thalamitai.

Why did the ancients give their ships female names?

There are many theories and no clear answers. Triremes, with only rare exceptions, were named after female deities or mythological figures. The Greeks named their ships after sea nymphs like Thetis or Charis or after women of legendary courage, such as Danae or Prokne. In ancient times the ship would also sail under a female figurehead that would guide or protect the vessel – before leaving port prayers and sacrifices were made to a goddess who was thought to safeguard the journey. The all-male crew may have associated their ship with the female shape and form – the boat, being a vessel of men, had clear female principles.

The truth behind the Trojan War

Thanks to new excavations and progress in the study of ancient texts, scholars are more convinced than ever that there is a kernel of truth in the myth

The Greeks and Romans often retold the story of the Trojan War, but the earliest and most prestigious version is Homer's. He was a Greek-speaking poet who probably lived in about 700 BCE in what is now western Turkey and composed two epic poems, stories of heroes long gone by. They are the *Iliad* or Story of Ilion (that is, Troy) and the *Odyssey* or Story of Odysseus. Their focus, the Trojan War, took place about 500 years earlier.

Homer enjoyed a long tradition of oral poetry and even perhaps written sources going back to the era of the Trojan War, and he could visit sites and monuments beginning with the ruins of Troy. His poems combine fact and myth.

According to myth, the Trojan War was a great conflict lasting ten years and pitting all Greece against the Trojans and their allies. Heroic champions fought on both sides. Even Amazons and Ethiopians got involved before the war was done. The Olympian gods themselves played a major role.

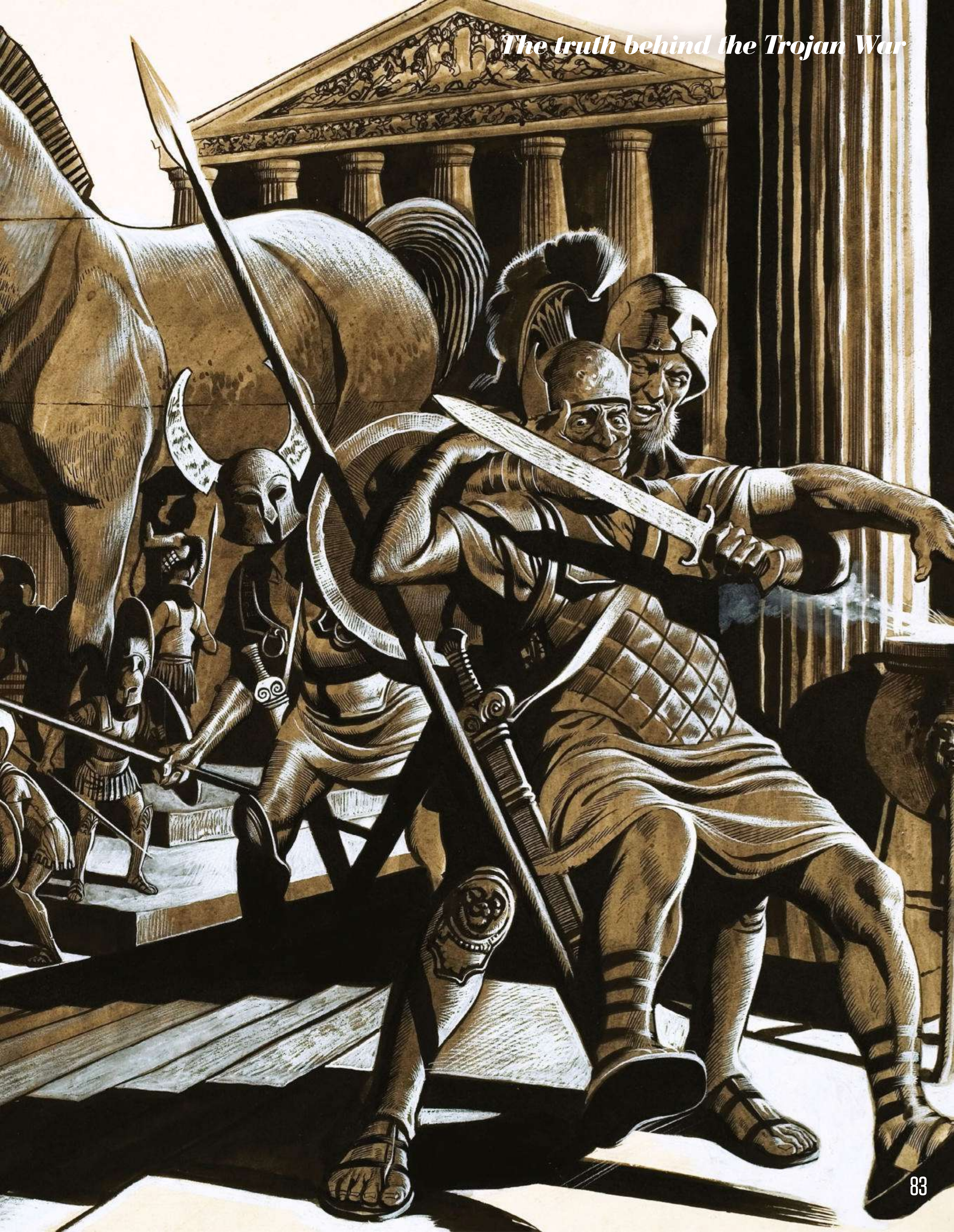
The cause of the war was a woman: Helen, the beautiful queen of Sparta, known in English as Helen of Troy. Prince Paris (also known as Alexander) of Troy seduced Helen while visiting Sparta. The two fled to Troy, taking with them much of Sparta's treasury.

Supported by the other Greek kings, Helen's husband, King Menelaus, and his brother, King Agamemnon of Mycenae, put together an armed Greek coalition that would sail to Troy with an ultimatum. The Greeks landed at Troy and demanded the return of Helen and the treasure. The Trojans refused, and so the war came. For nine years the Greeks ravaged and looted the Trojan countryside and surrounding islands, but they made no progress against the city of Troy, an impregnable fortress.

Then, the Greek army nearly fell apart. A deadly epidemic was followed by a mutiny on the part of Greece's greatest warrior, Achilles. The issue, once again, was a woman: this time, the beautiful Briseis, a prize of war unjustly grabbed from Achilles by Agamemnon. Achilles withdrew himself and his men from fighting. The Trojans, led by their hero Hector, nearly destroyed the Greeks, but after they killed Achilles' friend and lieutenant Patroclus, Achilles returned to battle. He killed Hector and saved the Greek army.

But the war dragged on – most of the details come from other epic poems besides Homer's, now largely lost. Achilles himself is killed. Finally, the Greek hero Odysseus leads the Greeks to victory at Troy by thinking up the brilliant trick of smuggling Greek warriors into Troy in the Trojan Horse, an operation that he also led. Troy was sacked, and of the major Trojan heroes, only Aeneas survived. The Romans later claimed that Aeneas and a group of Trojan refugees crossed the Mediterranean to Italy and founded what eventually became Rome.

But how much of the *Iliad* stems from truth? Is it all just myth, passed down from generation to generation, or is there a more historical basis to the Trojan War? Thanks to new findings, we can finally begin to piece together the mystery.



Mycenaean Greece

A thousand years before the Parthenon, a remarkable civilisation thrived in Greece and engaged with rivals across the Aegean Sea

Between 1450 and 1180 BCE, Greece was dominated by a series of warrior kingdoms, of which the most important were Mycenae, Thebes, Tiryns and Pylos. We call their civilisation Mycenaean. The inhabitants spoke Greek, as shown by thousands of surviving texts written in a syllabic script called Linear B, a predecessor to the later Greek alphabet. They worshipped the same pagan gods that feature in the *Iliad*.

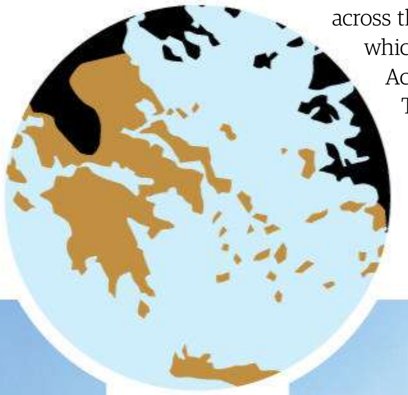
Mycenaean kings lived in palaces decorated with masterworks of art. Elite women were elegant and well dressed. Palace officials supervised the economic life of the kingdom and collected taxes and tribute. Their engineers built roads, bridges, fortifications, drainage works and large vaulted tombs. The city of Mycenae itself was eventually walled and entered via the Lion Gate that still impresses visitors today.

In the 15th century BCE, the Mycenaeans conquered Crete, the southwestern Aegean islands and the city of Miletus on Turkey's Aegean coast. Over the next several centuries, they engaged in war, diplomacy, commerce and dynastic intermarriage with the kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean. They advanced eastward into Lycia (southwestern Turkey) and Cyprus, provoked revolts in western Anatolia and pushed into the islands of the northeastern Aegean.

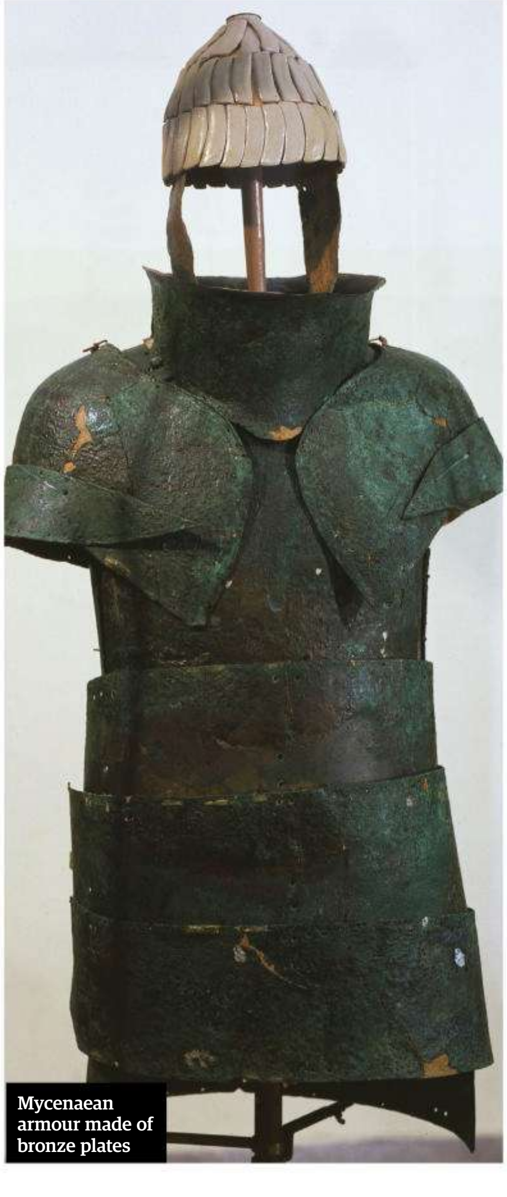
There were various kingdoms in Western Turkey in the Late Bronze Age, but by far the most important was what Hittite sources call Wilusa. The subject of international conflict and civil war, Wilusa is accepted by many scholars as the place the Greeks called first Wilion and then Ilion – Troy.

The Hittite texts also refer to a great kingdom across the sea known as Ahhiyawa, which most scholars equate with the Achaeans, the Mycenaean Greeks. The 'Ahhiyawa Letter' records correspondence between a Mycenaean king and the Hittite king in about 1250 BCE.

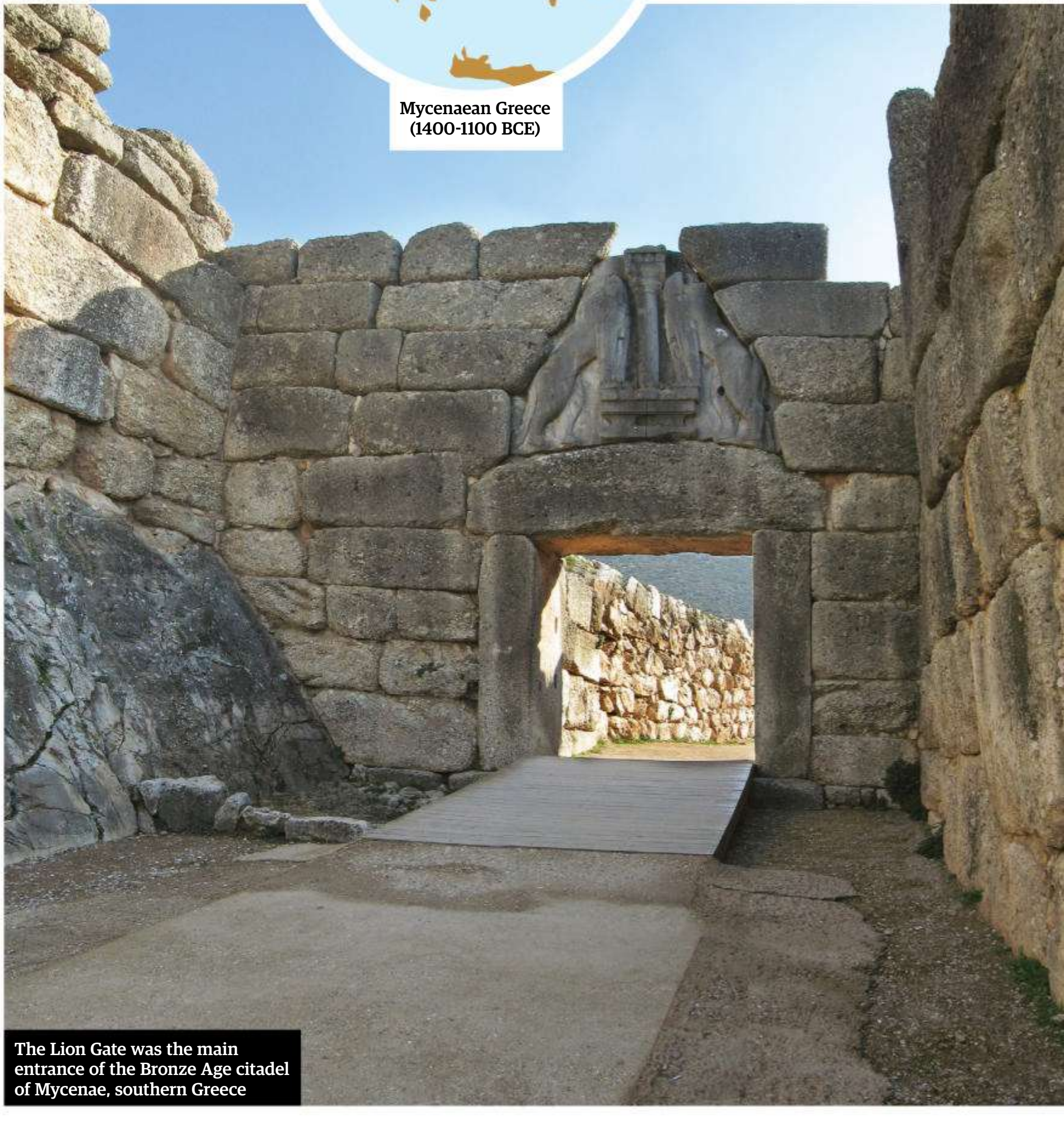
Troy was a great city for 2,000 years, from about 3000



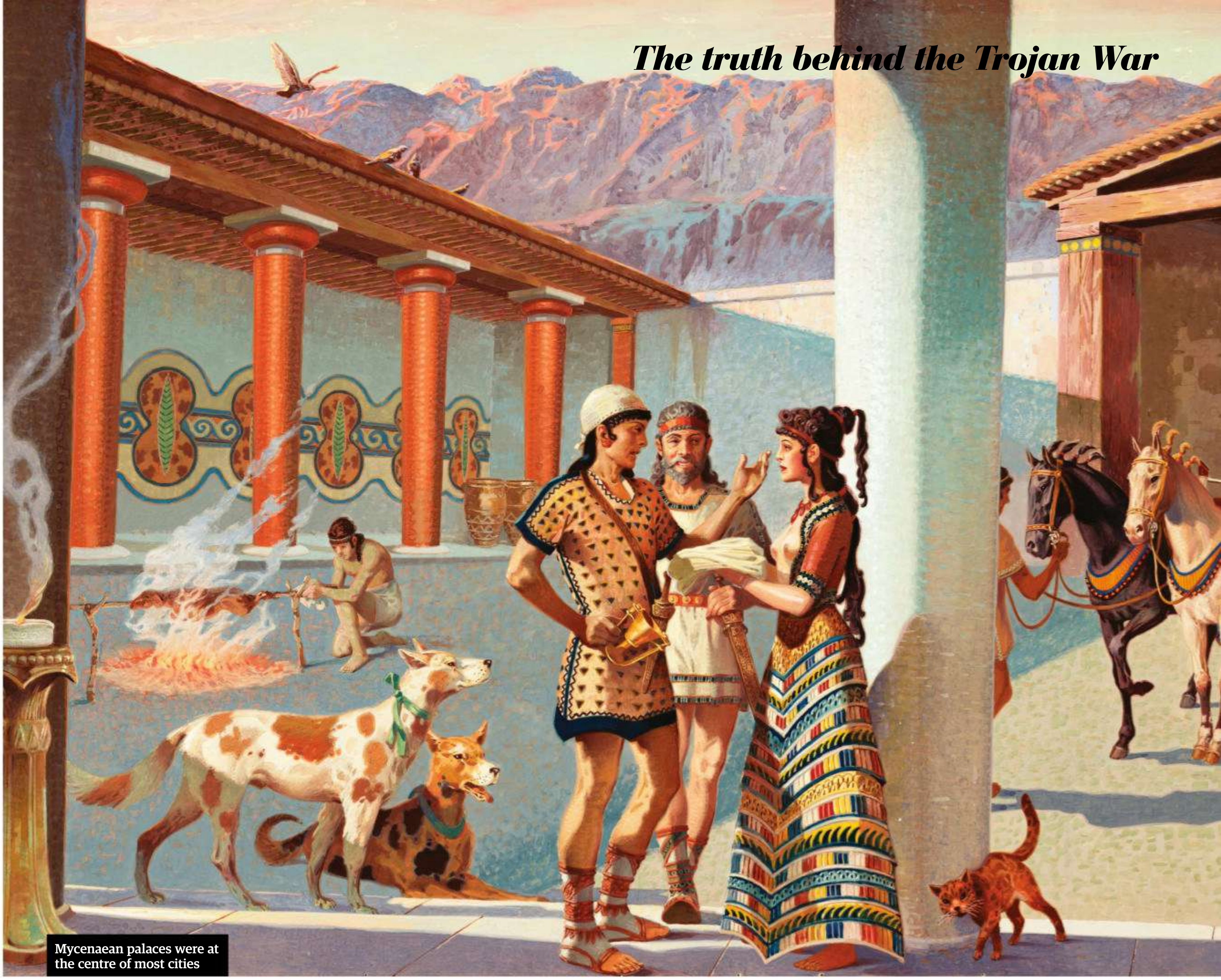
Mycenaean Greece (1400-1100 BCE)



Mycenaean armour made of bronze plates



The Lion Gate was the main entrance of the Bronze Age citadel of Mycenae, southern Greece



Mycenaean palaces were at the centre of most cities

“For nine years the Greeks ravaged and looted the Trojan countryside, but made no progress against the city of Troy”

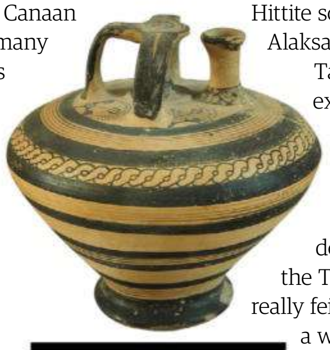
to 950 BCE. After being abandoned, Troy was resettled by Greek colonists in about 750 BCE and remained a small Greek city throughout antiquity, including the Roman period, and into the Byzantine era before it was abandoned. In the Late Bronze Age, Troy was wealthy and powerful. It was the largest city around the Aegean Sea, a major regional centre – if not nearly as large as the great cities of central Anatolia, the Levant, or Mesopotamia. Late-Bronze-Age Troy controlled important harbours and protected itself with a huge complex of walls, ditches and wooden palisades. If any period of Troy corresponds to the great city of the Trojan War, this was it.

Today we consider war the result of impersonal forces, be they economic, political or cultural. Late-Bronze-Age culture did the opposite and tended to think in personal terms. War resulted from vendettas, insults and marriage disputes. The Amarna Letters – a 1300s BCE cache of diplomatic correspondence between Egypt, Canaan and the Hittite kingdom – offer many examples, from wars over slights to a man’s father to a punitive raid after a prince was killed en route to his marriage to a foreign princess. When Homer attributed the Trojan War to a quarrel over the seduction of a queen, he was true to the Bronze Age.

This is not to say that Helen really existed: we have no proof of that. But some of the names in Homer and Greek myth are found in Linear B or Hittite texts. For instance, the name Achilles appears in Linear B. The Hittite texts refer to Attarrisiya from Ahhiyawa, perhaps the Greek Atreus (the name of Agamemnon’s father), and Tawagalawa, a brother of the king of Ahhiyawa. Today, many scholars would equate Tawagalawa with Eteocles in Greek myth, a king of the Greek city of Thebes. In Homer, one of the great princes of Troy is known both as Paris and Alexander.

Hittite sources refer to a Trojan king named Alaksandu and also to the name Pari-zitis.

Taking a city by storm or siege was very expensive. It’s not surprising that Hittite and Mesopotamian texts refer to tricks used to capture an enemy city, such as pretending to withdraw an army only to sweep back in on a foe that had let down its guard. There is no evidence that the Trojan Horse was real – that the Greeks really feigned their departure from Troy and left a wooden horse behind to get the Trojans to open their gates, but such a trick fits the spirit of Bronze Age warfare.



A Mycenaean stirrup vase from the 14th century BCE

The search for Troy

Archeologists have scoured Anatolia in the hunt for the mythical city. After years of excavation and speculation, it may have been found

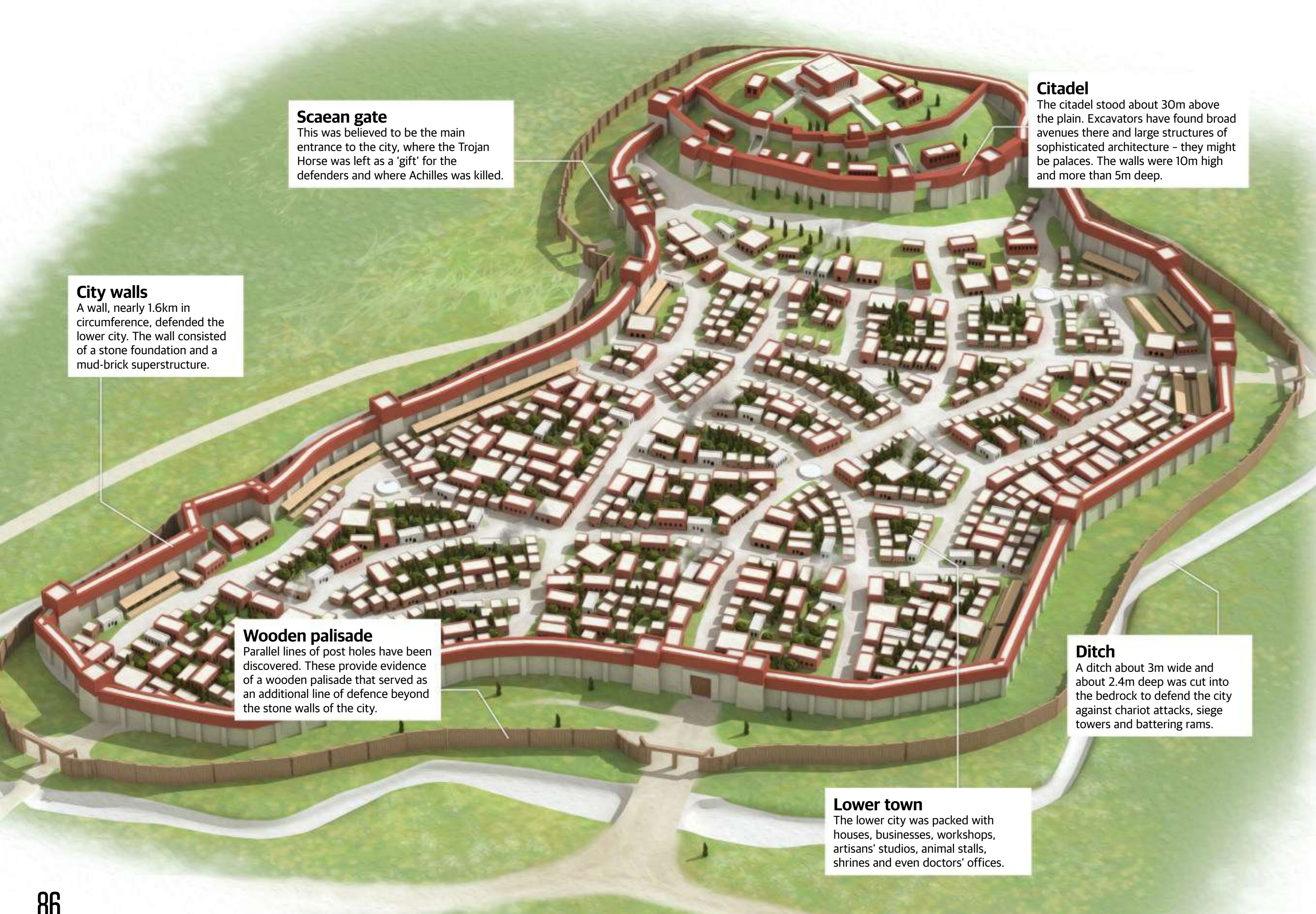
The search for Troy began in 1871 when the Homer-loving German-American businessman Heinrich Schliemann began excavating a mound south of the entrance to the Hellespont in northwestern Turkey; his excavations continued until 1890. Schliemann relied on earlier work by Frank Calvert, a Briton who served as American consul in the area. The mound was called Hisarlik, Turkish for 'Place of Fortresses'. Schliemann believed that he had found Troy.

Schliemann was an amateur and something of a con man, but the German architect Wilhelm Dörpfeld, who continued at Troy in 1893-94, put Schliemann's work on a firmer, scientific footing. American archaeologist Carl Blegen next directed excavations at Troy (1932-38). Between 1988 and 2012, a joint German-American archaeological team under the direction of the late Manfred Korfmann (followed in 2005 by Ernest Pernicka) and Brian Rose excavated at Troy. Since 2013, Rüstem Aslan has been director of a Turkish excavation at Troy.

Troy sat at the entrance to the Hellespont, near where it pours into the Aegean Sea. The city had protected harbours on both bodies of water. The Hellespont leads in turn into the Sea of Marmara, the Bosporus and the Black Sea, making it a strategic waterway for merchant vessels and warships. But the Hellespont is not easy to navigate. In addition to struggling against a strong current there, seafarers have to face a powerful north wind for much of the sailing season. Troy grew rich as a place for merchants to meet, trade and wait for the wind to die down. It also traded in horses raised on the fertile soil of its hinterland.

Today's Troy consists of a series of levels, one on top of another, creating a man-made mound about 15 metres high. These are the remains of thousands of years of mudbrick houses. When ancient Trojans rebuilt, they simply levelled old houses and constructed new ones on top of them, which explains the different layers of the city.

Ancient Troy has ten settlement layers dating from circa 2920 BCE to 1300, from the Bronze Age through the Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods. Which level, if any, was Homer's Troy? Schliemann thought it was Troy II (2550-2250 BCE), a period of mud-brick citadel walls, temples, a palace complex and a massive ramp. Schliemann also found



Scaean gate
This was believed to be the main entrance to the city, where the Trojan Horse was left as a 'gift' for the defenders and where Achilles was killed.

Citadel
The citadel stood about 30m above the plain. Excavators have found broad avenues there and large structures of sophisticated architecture – they might be palaces. The walls were 10m high and more than 5m deep.

City walls
A wall, nearly 1.6km in circumference, defended the lower city. The wall consisted of a stone foundation and a mud-brick superstructure.

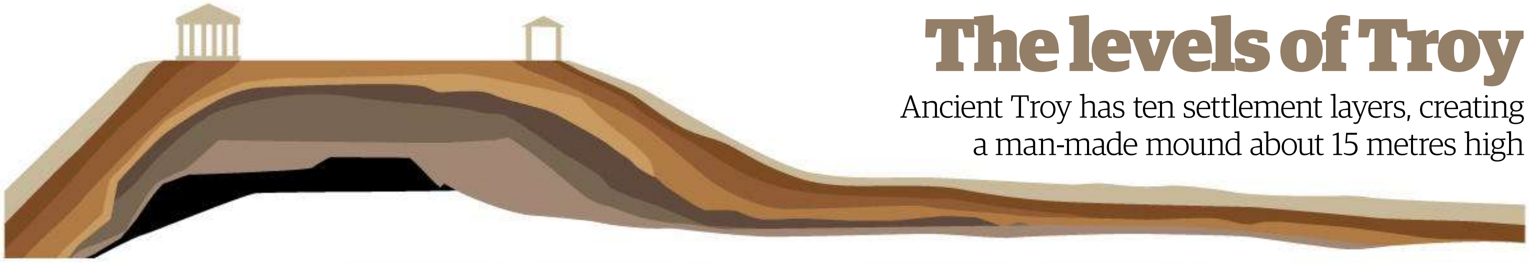
Wooden palisade
Parallel lines of post holes have been discovered. These provide evidence of a wooden palisade that served as an additional line of defence beyond the stone walls of the city.

Ditch
A ditch about 3m wide and about 2.4m deep was cut into the bedrock to defend the city against chariot attacks, siege towers and battering rams.

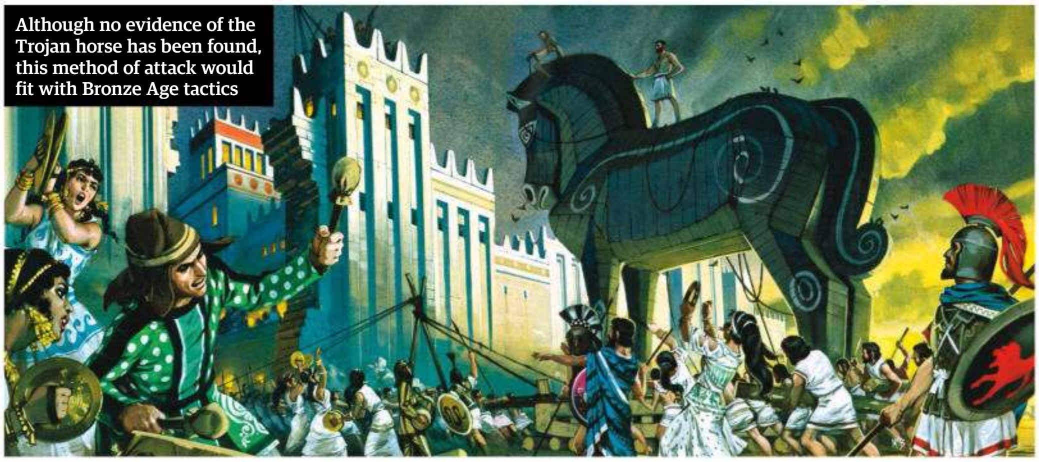
Lower town
The lower city was packed with houses, businesses, workshops, artisans' studios, animal stalls, shrines and even doctors' offices.

The levels of Troy

Ancient Troy has ten settlement layers, creating a man-made mound about 15 metres high



Level	Date	Description
LEVEL I	2920-2350 BCE	The earliest settlement, small but wealthy, concentrated on the citadel, fortified with gates. **Cause of destruction: rebuilding**
LEVEL II	2550-2250 BCE	The so-called 'Burnt City', rebuilt the earlier level on a larger scale with an impressive citadel wall. 'Treasures of Priam' found. **Cause of destruction: fire**
LEVEL III	2250-2200 BCE	A smaller-scale version of Level II with cultural continuity. **Cause of destruction: fire**
LEVEL IV/V	2200-1740 BCE	Anatolian-Trojan Culture introduced. Citadel expanded, economy shifts to hunting, more connections with central Turkey. **Cause of destruction: fire**
LEVEL VI	1740-1180 BCE	Golden Age of Troy; the city reached its maximum prosperity and extent. It was probably Homer's Troy. **Cause of destruction: fire, probably war**
LEVEL VII-VIIB3	1180-950 BCE	Early-Iron-Age Troy was rebuilt on a smaller scale, mainly in the upper city, with influence from the Balkans. **Cause of destruction: abandonment**
LEVEL VIII	700-85 BCE	Greek city of Ilion. Refounded by Greeks after being abandoned for 250 years. Ilion was sacked by Romans. **Cause of destruction: Roman conquest**
LEVEL IX	85 BCE-500 CE	Roman city of Ilium. Boosted under Emperors Augustus and Hadrian, who saw Troy as the ancestral city of Rome. **Cause of destruction: earthquakes**
LEVEL X	1100-1300	Byzantine Ilion A small community. **Cause of destruction: Ottoman conquest**



Although no evidence of the Trojan horse has been found, this method of attack would fit with Bronze Age tactics

sophisticated wheel-made pottery and more than 20 impressive so-called 'Treasures of Priam' of gold and other precious metals.

After excavating the massive fortifications of Troy's citadel, which he labelled Troy VI (1740-1180 BCE), Dörpfeld more credibly identified them with Homer's Troy. Generally considered the peak of ancient Trojan civilisation, it came about 1,000 years later than Schliemann had thought.

Blegen, who subdivided the levels further, changed the identification to Level VII, and the most recent excavators identify Homer's Troy as Level VI, which they date to 1300-1210/1180 BCE. However, the most important change lies less in the refinement of dating than in our overall understanding of the site.

Previously, scholars thought that Troy was only a small citadel, impressive in its stone fortification walls but only about half an acre in size. Thanks to the most recent excavations, we now know that Troy was, in fact, about 75 acres in size, with a large lower city beneath the citadel. The lower city was packed with houses, businesses, workshops, artisans' studios, animal stalls, shrines, and even doctors' offices. We estimate that several thousand people, no more than 10,000, lived in Troy.

A wall, nearly 1.6 kilometres in circumference, defended the lower city. The wall consisted of a stone foundation and a mud-brick superstructure. Outside the wall there was a ditch, cut into the bedrock, and a wooden palisade, to defend the city against chariot attacks. The lower city's defenders could avail themselves of fresh water from an underground stream – worshipped as a god – and reached through tunnels carved 150 metres into the rock.

The citadel walls traced a circumference of 350 metres standing about ten metres high and more than five metres thick. Their six-metre-high stone base sloped outward, making the walls difficult to climb. The stone base was topped with a four-metre-high mud-brick superstructure. A nine-metre-high tower defended the South Gate, probably the citadel's main entrance.

The new excavations have not gone without controversy. Critics suggested that the defensive trench was a drainage ditch and there is no shortage of candidates elsewhere in Turkey – and beyond – for the site of Troy. But the trench runs uphill, so it can hardly be a drainage ditch, and Hisarlik fits Homer's description of the site beautifully, which cannot be said of any other would-be Troy.

There was never good reason to doubt that some sort of Trojan War happened. After all, the ancient authors all believed in it, even the realist Thucydides, who challenged only the idea that it was fought over a woman rather than over power and wealth. The findings demonstrate the presence at Troy of a language related to Hittite, which strengthens the hints in Hittite texts that Troy was a Hittite ally. Hittite texts also demonstrate that Ahhiyawa, whose name strongly suggests the Achaeans – the Greeks found in Homer's works – engaged in war and diplomacy with Hittites on what is today the Turkish mainland.

Around 1180 BCE, a great fire destroyed Troy. The excavators have found weapons – arrowheads, spearheads and sling stones – as well as unburied human bones, which all suggest a sudden and violent attack. The towns around Troy, according to a recent survey, may have been abandoned around 1200 BCE, consistent with an invasion.

In short, archaeological and textual evidence provides considerable support to the tradition, unanimously believed by ancient writers, that Greeks attacked and sacked Troy. That wouldn't stand up as evidence in a criminal case in a court of law, but it is more than plausible.

Of course, it doesn't prove the existence of Helen or Achilles or any other characters of myth, but in various ways, from vendettas to raiding to cunning ploys to capture enemy cities, those characters echo the behaviour of people in the Late Bronze Age.

The 'Mask of Agamemnon', discovered in 1876 by Schliemann

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Sparta: warrior state

Pain, cruelty and brutal training techniques – life for a boy in Sparta makes the regimen of today's elite forces appear soft. Explore the way of the warrior state through the eyes of a soldier pushed to his physical and emotional limits

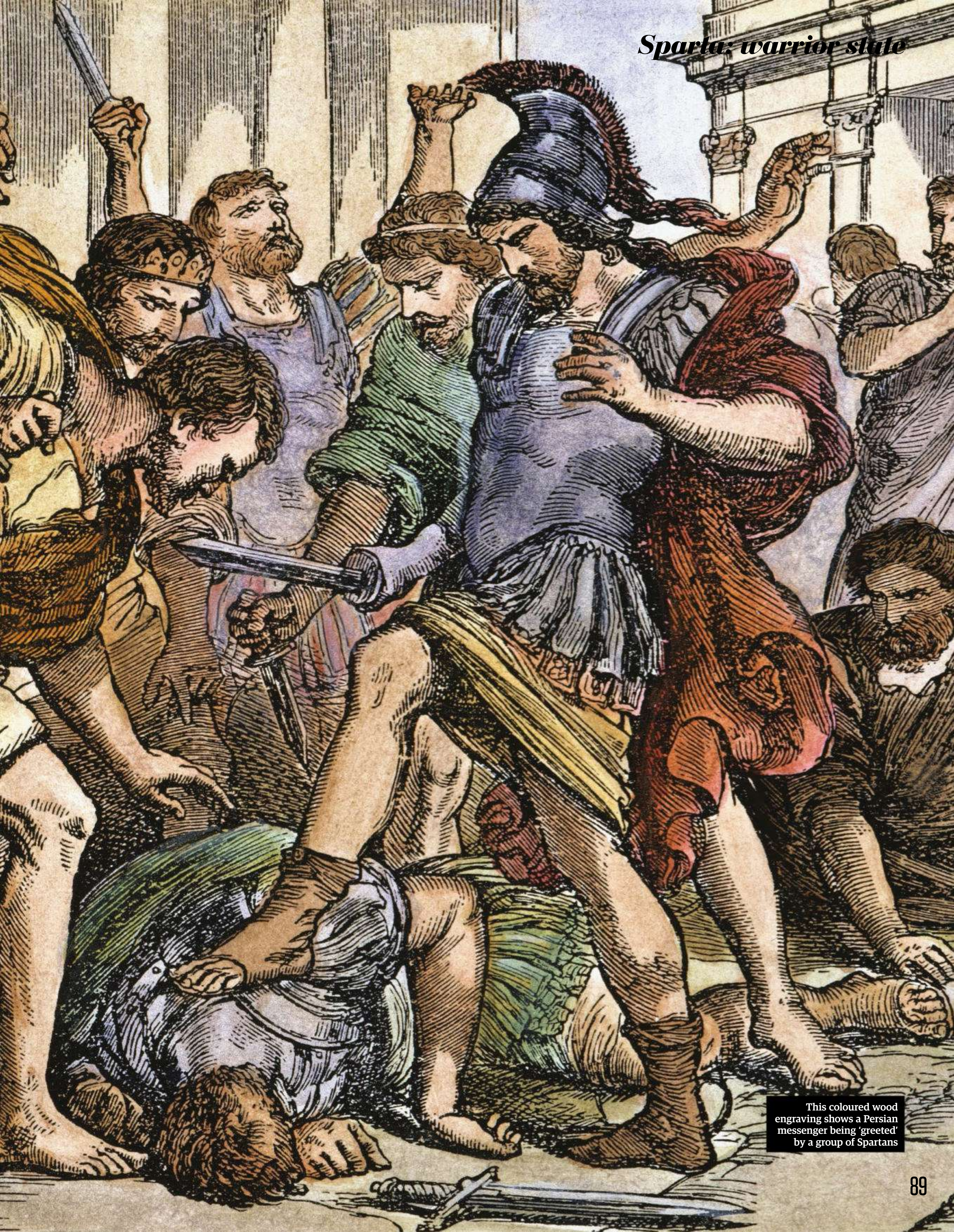
"Come back with your shield, or on it." These were words that would resonate for any warrior, but for Aristodemus, even the memory of his mother's voice reciting the Spartan rhetoric made him feel deeply ashamed. His hand gripped the shaft of his spear, knuckles whiter and palm slicker than those of his comrades, his focus narrowed to a pinpoint even through the visor of his full helm. This battle was important: retribution against the would-be invading army of Xerxes, for the sacrifice that the warrior king Leonidas and his chosen 300 Spartans made at Thermopylae the year before.

The story of his birth was a minor legend even in his own time: when the ephors – Sparta's elder statesmen – took him from his mother to Mount Taygetos, Aristodemus was small and jaundiced. He was placed in the gorge for starvation, the weather or wild animals to take him – but the Spartan babe had no intention of going the same way as so many other newborns. In that cursed place he clung to ephor Sphodrias' fingers so tightly that he was unable to shake this tiny child from his grasp. Beaten, and seeing the Spartan pup in a new light, Sphodrias had taken Aristodemus back to his mother to be reared at home.

In the light of what Aristodemus was about to do, Sphodrias might well have bashed him against the ground until his hand was released. But the elders weren't around to judge him now, as Aristodemus broke rank and surged forward. One of his fellow hoplites tried to grab him but there was little purchase on his polished bronze cuirass. Besides, Aristodemus was fleet of foot even among his peers. He sprinted toward the advancing Persians, over 30 years of punitive daily training and cruel warrior trials pulsing through his mind.

He must have been three years old when he was left alone for hours in the pitch black of his home, bawling for his mother to light a lamp or to keep him company, to no avail. Then his mother would come home and temper his body by emptying an amphora full of stale wine over his head until his eyes stung. He'd been half-starved his whole life but it was around this time that the gnawing in his stomach was unbearable. And then, like any other Spartan boy, he was taken away at the age of seven to become a Spartan paidion and to live in the barracks, lest his easy living with his mother soften him.

The next 12 years of his life were spent in the increasingly tough regime of the agoge. Mandatory



This coloured wood engraving shows a Persian messenger being 'greeted' by a group of Spartans

"He was placed in the gorge for starvation, the weather or wild animals to take him"

to all male Spartan citizens except the first-born sons of the royal houses, it was here Aristodemus was taught stealth, combat and communication among other military disciplines. Above all, loyalty to Sparta was driven into him, to ensure that when the time came, he wouldn't hesitate to put the state before his own life.

Life in the agoge at least made sense of his early youth, even if the Spartan warrior fraternity was brutal. The entire agelai (the 'pack', or class) of Spartan youths Aristodemus was enrolled into were once stripped to the waist and flayed simultaneously – just to try their endurance. Their families watched, encouraging their sons to act like the Spartan warriors they aspired to be, to silently take the pain. After four strokes, Dion (who was particularly skilled at the fight-dance pyrriche and had the hallmarks of a future leader) cried out in anguish. His parents hissed at him from the sidelines and he was disgraced. Meanwhile, Aristodemus was still standing silently after 23 excruciating lashes. As the last paidon standing he had proved his mettle and he was lifted onto the broad shoulders of his trainer while his mother beamed at him. The thick scars that licked across his back were his trophies and a testament to his honour.

A reckless battle-rage now took him as the faces in the Persian front line came into focus. Aristodemus could make out doubt, confusion and even a trace of fear in the half-helms of Xerxes' so-called 'Immortals.' The indomitable form of a Spartan phalanx could break the confidence of the average soldier, but not even the cream of the Persian elite would willingly go toe-to-toe with a Spartan hoplite consumed with wanton bloodlust.

As he closed the final few dusty yards, the hard, bittersweet memories of his teenage years flooded unbidden into his mind. At the age of 13, Aristodemus made the transition from paidon to a meirakion, or youth, and his life became tougher at every level. He was stripped of individuality, his head shaved and he often went unclothed: a Spartan had no need of the trappings of weaker nations, being a Spartan soldier was dignified enough. He slept among his peers in a crowded dormitory on a bed of hard reeds, endured chilly winters and blistering summers and often returned bleeding and beaten from his exhausting daily martial routine. He didn't complain or so much as whimper; he considered himself lucky that a bloody mouth and cracked ribs was the extent of his injuries. The dummy spears and swords they trained with might have been wooden but they were no mere toys. One of his fellow agelai, Procles, let his guard slip for just a fraction of a second, enough for his sparring partner to exploit the opening and deliver a blow to Procles' temple so furious that he died on the spot. There was no mourning – Procles was obviously not cut out to be a Spartan soldier.

And now Aristodemus whispered a brief prayer to Apollo and Ares as he

Why did Sparta concentrate on warriors?

There's one main reason why Sparta formed a militaristic state of institutionalised warriors while the rest of Greece embraced the arts: the helots. These were a population the Spartans enslaved in the 8th century BCE. Formerly known as the Messenians, their land was rich and fertile compared to that of the Spartans, so they took it from them and forced these new slaves to toil the fields for Sparta. The trouble was, these helots were many times more numerous than the Spartans, were toughened by hard labour and frequently rebelled against their masters. The Spartans needed to control them in the most effective way they knew: by creating a martial government that rooted out the weak and forced everyone left into serving the military, whatever that entailed. Sparta did live in constant fear of a helot revolt, however, and with good reason – at one point they outnumbered the Spartans by as much as ten to one.

Milestones of a warrior

Age 0

Trial at birth
Spartan boys were put to the test the moment they were born. They were taken from their mothers and brought to the Spartan elders, who decided whether the child would be brought up as a Spartan warrior, or taken to a place known as the apothetae at Mount Taygetos and left to die.

Age 0-6

Toddler training
Early life for a Spartan boy set the stage for a harsh military-oriented future. By frequently being left alone in dark or unfamiliar places and being washed in wine Spartans believed that their children would grow up much stronger than they would with a traditional upbringing.

Age 7

To the barracks
At around seven years of age they would begin the first of three stages of the Spartan agoge. They became a paidon (a boy) and started their military career in earnest as a part of a pack of young trainees guided by a teacher who would be known as the paidonomos.

Age 10

Martial arts
Though Spartan boys were in training to fight, they were also taught the culture of Sparta and were encouraged to compete against each other in music and dancing, as well as more martial pursuits. At the very least, the Spartans recognised the value of rhythm in combat.

Age 13

Bonding Practice
Once a Spartan boy finished his 12th year he became a meirakion (a youth) and his training became more rigorous. His exercise was ramped up and he fought barefoot and half-naked. It was around this age that he must bond with an older man – a 'lover' – from whom he could derive guidance.

Training techniques

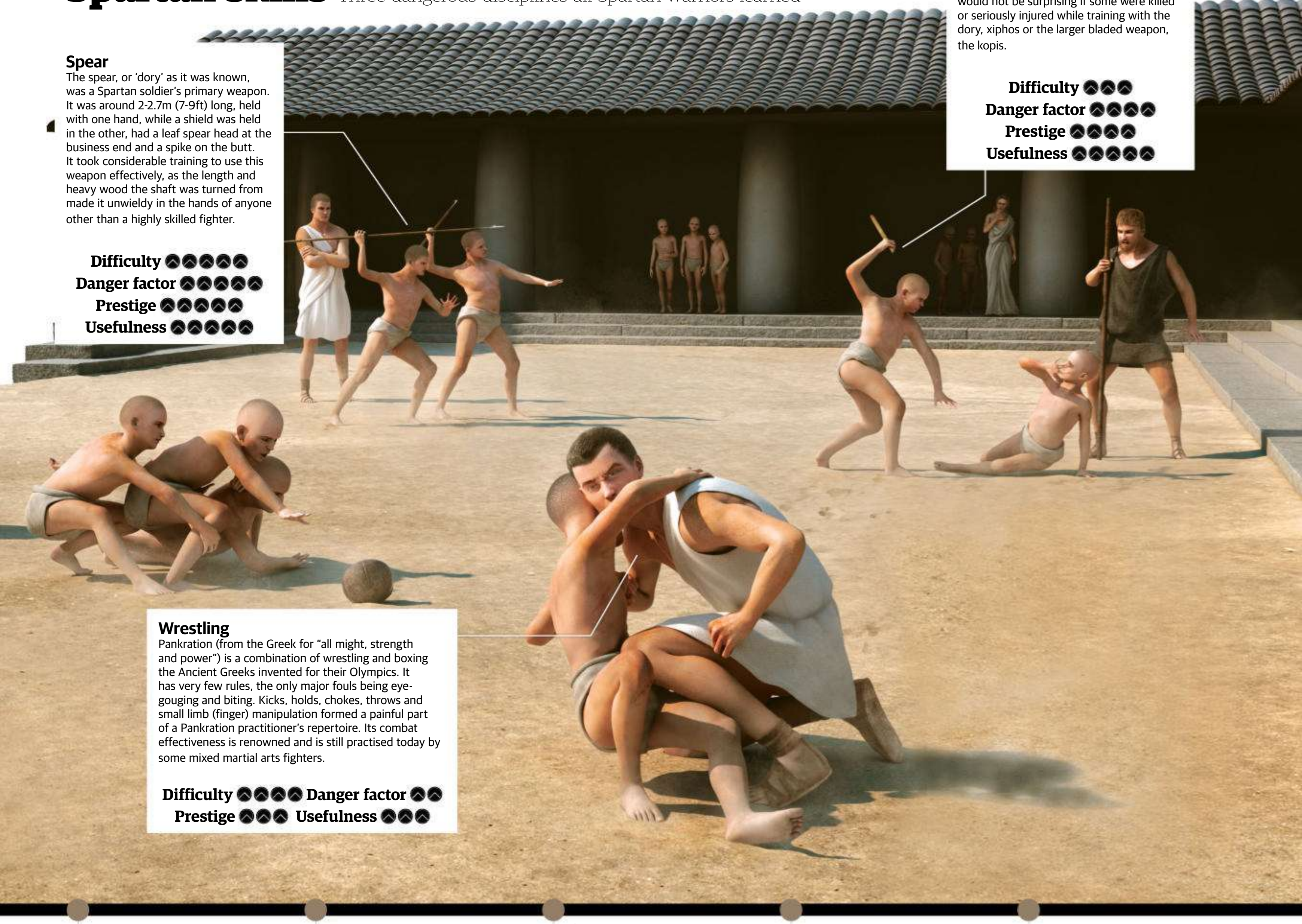
Olympic gym meets military boot camp

As a part of Greece, Sparta incorporated many of their training techniques of their countrymen - some of which are still used by athletes today. The intensity of an exercise could be increased by hand weights or by making them run on sand. Gentle walking as a low-intensity cool-down was reckoned to be beneficial to their recovery and rest days were a vital a part of their conditioning. But there were remarkably cruel aspects to their training too.

Alongside the ritualistic flaying, known as the 'diamastigosis', there was the 'hazing': instructors regularly whipped up rivalries and instigated fights between trainees to harden their minds as well as their bodies. Those who were timid or showed signs of cowardice were pounced upon, teased and beaten by the instructor and other trainees alike. There was no place for these traits in a Spartan youth.

Spartan skills

Three dangerous disciplines all Spartan warriors learned



Spear

The spear, or 'dory' as it was known, was a Spartan soldier's primary weapon. It was around 2-2.7m (7-9ft) long, held with one hand, while a shield was held in the other, had a leaf spear head at the business end and a spike on the butt. It took considerable training to use this weapon effectively, as the length and heavy wood the shaft was turned from made it unwieldy in the hands of anyone other than a highly skilled fighter.

Difficulty ●●●●●
Danger factor ●●●●●
Prestige ●●●●●
Usefulness ●●●●●

Sword

The Spartan's xiphos was a close-range weapon of around 30-40cm (12-16in) in length (shorter than the swords of other Greeks), razor-sharp and as quick as it was deadly in a Spartan warrior's hands. In the tight melee of the Spartan phalanx they were far more effective than the weapons of the enemy, penetrating shield walls and inflicting devastating wounds. Given the fervour the state instilled in its youth, it would not be surprising if some were killed or seriously injured while training with the dory, xiphos or the larger bladed weapon, the kopis.

Difficulty ●●●
Danger factor ●●●●
Prestige ●●●●
Usefulness ●●●●●

Wrestling

Pankration (from the Greek for "all might, strength and power") is a combination of wrestling and boxing the Ancient Greeks invented for their Olympics. It has very few rules, the only major fouls being eye-gouging and biting. Kicks, holds, chokes, throws and small limb (finger) manipulation formed a painful part of a Pankration practitioner's repertoire. Its combat effectiveness is renowned and is still practised today by some mixed martial arts fighters.

Difficulty ●●●● **Danger factor** ●●
Prestige ●●● **Usefulness** ●●●

Age 13-18

Teenage trials
During the five years leading up to adulthood, Spartan boys were fed a meagre diet in the belief it would make them tall and strong, and prepare them for future military campaigns with little in the way of rations. They could steal food if they wanted more, but were severely punished if caught.

Age 18

Passing on knowledge
When the Spartan boy became an eiren (adult) he would spend his first year helping to train other youths at the barracks before moving to a mess with around 15 other, unmarried young Spartan soldiers. It was around this age he may have been sent on missions to kill unruly helots.

Age 20-30

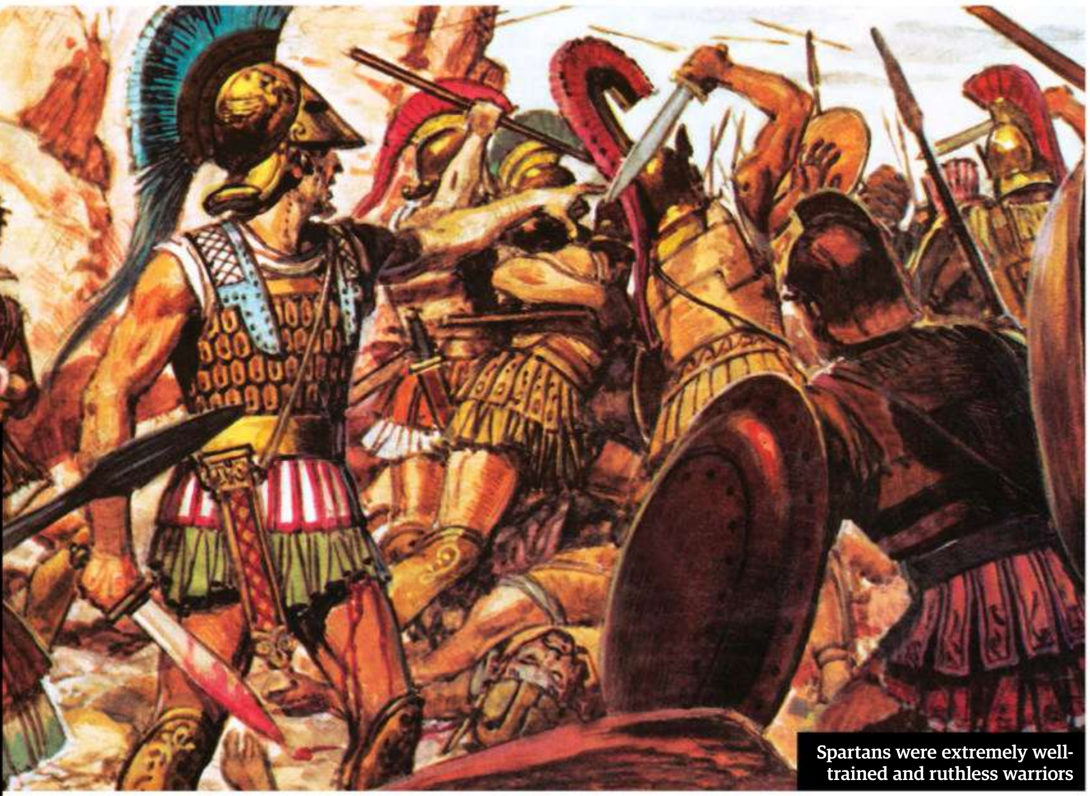
Secret service
At some point after becoming a full member of the Spartan army but before their 30th birthday, a Spartan soldier was liable to two years in the krypteia, what was essentially the Spartan secret service. Part of their duties would have been to maintain control of helots in rural areas.

Age 30

Got the vote
Spartan boys were only really allowed the full privileges of adulthood within their society after their twenties. They were now finally allowed to marry or talk to other Spartans in the marketplace. Also, they could now vote and be voted in to hold a post in office.

Age 60

Retirement of a sort
If a Spartan became a weak link for any reason, they could be retired from their current post on the front lines and given more menial duties. Older Spartan soldiers up to the age of around 60 were often sent to the rear for tasks such as to guard the baggage train on long campaigns.



Spartans were extremely well-trained and ruthless warriors

Three great victories

A small selection of Sparta's greatest military successes

Plataea 479 BCE

Who did they fight? Persia (Mardonius)

Having retreated back into Persia, Xerxes left it to his general Mardonius to tackle the Greek city-state alliance. An 11-day stalemate culminated in a withdrawal by the Greeks to resupply. This was taken as a full retreat by Mardonius and proved a fatal error. Spotting the enthusiastic - and reckless - Persian advance, the Spartans and other Greek armies halted their withdrawal and trapped a significant portion of the Persian infantry, routing them. The tide of the battle turned and the Persian invasion was repelled.

Thermopylae 480 BCE

Who did they fight? Persia (Xerxes I)

Of course, the defeat of the Spartans at Thermopylae at the hands of the Persians is well documented. Around 4,000 other Greek soldiers along with 300 Spartans held the narrow pass of the Hot Gates before their position was compromised by the Persians, and Leonidas decided to turn away all but his own men and around 1,000 other soldiers. However, their sacrifice bought time for the rest of the Greek forces to retreat and for the Greek cities to prepare for the invasion. It bolstered the morale of the other Greek states and ultimately contributed to Xerxes' army's own retreat back into Persia.

The Peloponnesian War

431-404 BCE

Who did they fight? Athens

Spanning nearly 30 years and punctuated by a brief truce, the culmination of this protracted war resulted in one of Sparta's greatest victories. Ironically, Sparta received some support from its old enemy, the Persians, as well as from its allies Corinth and Thebes, to make the final push on the powerful Athenian navy. Athens was crushed, the former major power in Greece was reduced to a slave-state and Sparta became, for a time, the leading light of the Greek city-states.

breached the Persian lines. The first Immortal he met didn't come close to living up to the title of his rank. Aristodemus used the momentum gained from his maniac charge to plough his spear straight through his shield and pierce his throat. He didn't even attempt to retrieve his weapon from the Persian's body, the close range was ideally suited to his xiphos, a deceptively short sword that was deadly in the hands of a Spartan worth his salt. The next Persian to fall had somehow turned his flank to the maddened Spartan.

Buzzing with adrenaline and a catharsis of emotion, Aristodemus re-enacted the memory of his first kill. This was not a soldier from an invading army, but a helot slave gathering fruit in a vineyard. Spartans would encourage their youths to steal to supplement their poor diet, to make them stealthy and cunning. If they were caught, they were usually beaten or whipped: the punishment was not for stealing, but for being caught.

By the time he was approaching manhood, this trial had taken a darker path. Signs of resistance were rippling through the helot slave community so the ephors used this opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. To nip any chance of revolt in the bud and to hone the blooming talent for violence their youths had begun to exhibit, the ephors gave Aristodemus and a handful of others some meagre rations, a xiphos and the simple order to go into the Greek countryside, to stalk and kill a helot slave. Preferably a big one.

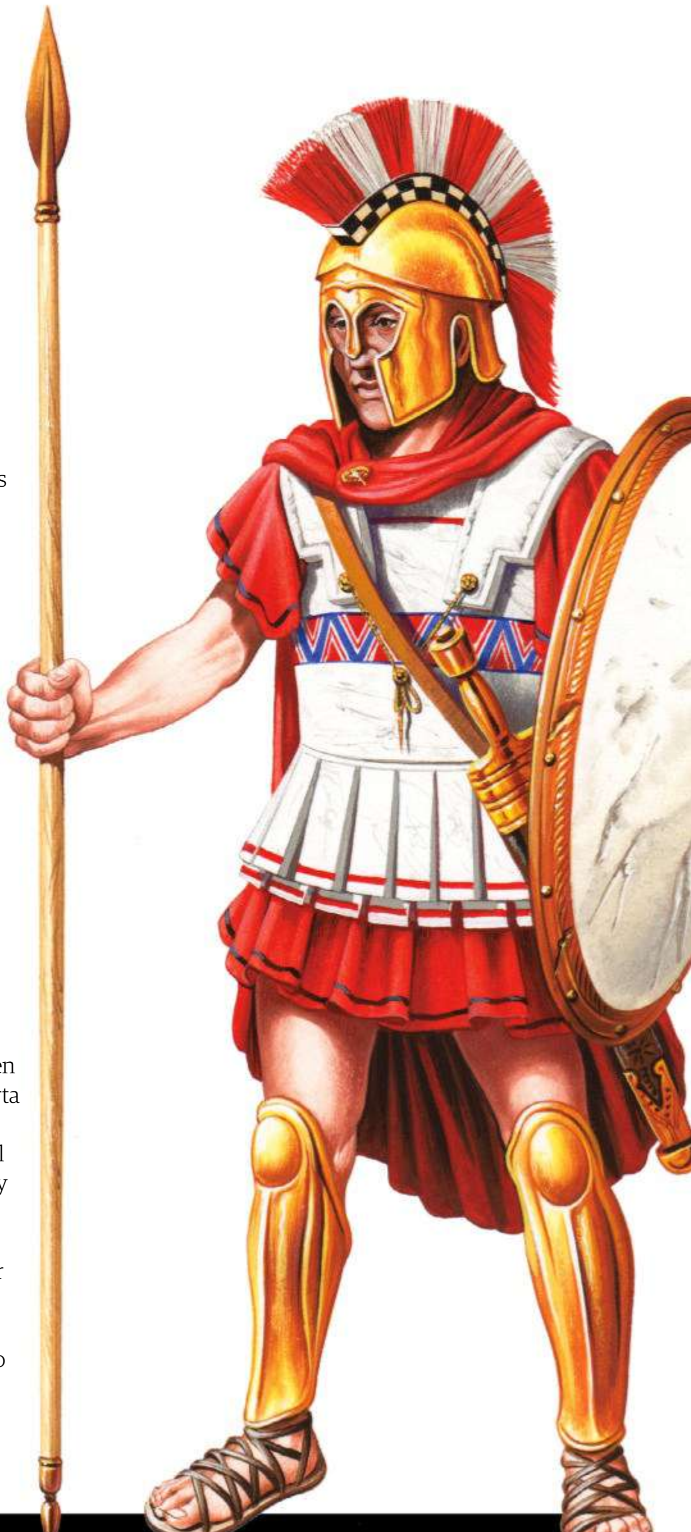
It took Aristodemus a day to choose his target and then wait until the big man was alone and burdened with grapes. The attack was lightning-quick and came from unexpected quarters: Aristodemus ambushed the helot the way he'd been taught, his xiphos cleaving deep into the man's groin three times, severing the femoral artery and barely giving him a chance to acknowledge his attacker, who had fled the scene before the helot collapsed.

It seemed the Persians were almost as unused to the savagely efficient way the Spartans could wield their weapons as the helots. This Immortal looked dumbstruck as Aristodemus' blade flashed three times in the sunlight, before his legs gave way following a torrent of blood spilling onto the battlefield.

The Persian front line was done absorbing Aristodemus' suicidal charge, and now it was time for the lines to close and repel this wayward Spartan. In the ensuing melee, a cut he inflicted to a Persian's head blinded one of his opponents.

An eye for an eye. Now that felt more like redemption. Thermopylae had never been far from Aristodemus' mind this past year, but the memory of his disgrace now came back to him with the same

> "He hanged himself rather than face the shame Aristodemus experienced on his return to Sparta"



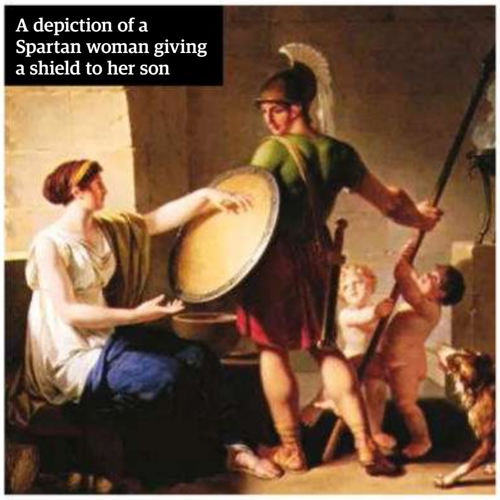
vigour of his battle fury. Having survived two days at the narrow pass of the Hot Gates, Aristodemus' eye became infected, effectively blinding him. To King Leonidas, he was now a weak link and a liability to the effectiveness of his war machine. He was denied the honour of fighting for what would be the final, fateful day and was sent back to Sparta along with another unfortunate soldier, Eurytus, who suffered the same affliction.

Halfway home and realising what they would face upon returning alive and without the honour of victory, Eurytus decided to return to the Hot Gates and meet his fate. Aristodemus followed the orders of his king, however, and suffered a worse fate than his kinsmen at Thermopylae. He was snubbed, branded 'Aristodemus the coward', free Spartans could strike him in the street with impunity (though few dared put that law to the test), while no man could offer him shelter. It would have been the lowest ebb for any Spartan and yet, Aristodemus could still fight for Sparta - he could still redeem himself. Maybe it would be here, at the Battle of Plataea, with this final act of heroic abandon? Or if the black mark wasn't struck from his name, then his death would at least end the pain of his dishonour.

Aristodemus was one of only two survivors from the famous battle of Thermopylae. The other, who arrived too late at the final battle, hanged himself rather than face the shame Aristodemus experienced on his return to Sparta. This made Aristodemus the only veteran of Thermopylae to fight in the Battle of Plataea, and goes some way to explaining why contemporary Greek historians picked out this particular soldier.

The story of Aristodemus is the embodiment of the highs and lows of the Spartan way. From an early age, they were forged into superhuman fighting machines through a merciless training regime and the denial of some of the most basic of human needs - whether that was a square meal or the love and attention of their parents. Boys were broken down and taught to live by their wits, to rely only on other Spartan soldiers, especially their 'lovers' - the dubious title given to their adult guardians. The city-state of Sparta has earned a legendary status today because it was pathologically willing to trade a normal life for its own sons in order to create an army the ancient world would tremble before.

Aristodemus threw his life away at Plataea and his peers afforded him no special honour as a result. But Sparta recognised the fury and strength with which he fought, which saw him kill several Persians before he fell. So in the eyes of his people, in the ethos of the brutal warrior state of Sparta, he had finally redeemed himself.



A depiction of a Spartan woman giving a shield to her son

Fact or fiction: Is this Sparta?

300 defended Thermopylae

King Leonidas and 300 of his chosen Spartan warriors single-handedly held off a Persian army of 100,000 at Thermopylae for three days, fighting to the last man before they succumbed.

Verdict

Fiction

There were approximately 300 Spartans, but they were joined by thousands of other Greeks.

Women trained too

Spartan women also had a rigorous training routine and competed in athletics and gymnastics against boys. It was believed it was important for women to be physically fit to bear children.

Verdict

Fact

For the time, women were held in very high regard in Sparta.

Ephors were evil

The ephors (elders) of Sparta were a group of powerful and lecherous old men who left Spartan newborns to die and demanded great sums of money for their wisdom, which the kings of Sparta valued greatly.

Verdict

Fiction

They were simply elders who held power and respect in Sparta.

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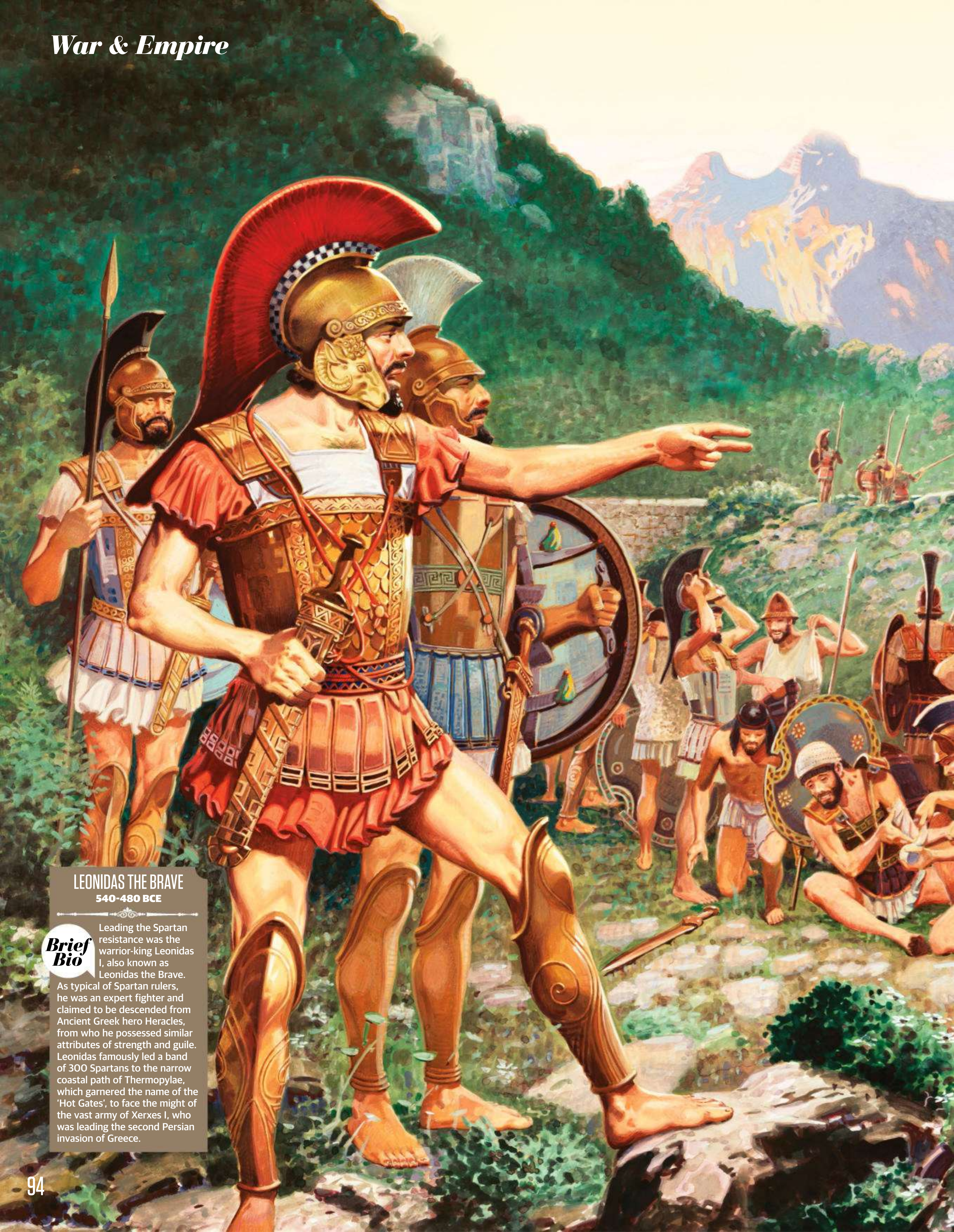


LEONIDAS THE BRAVE

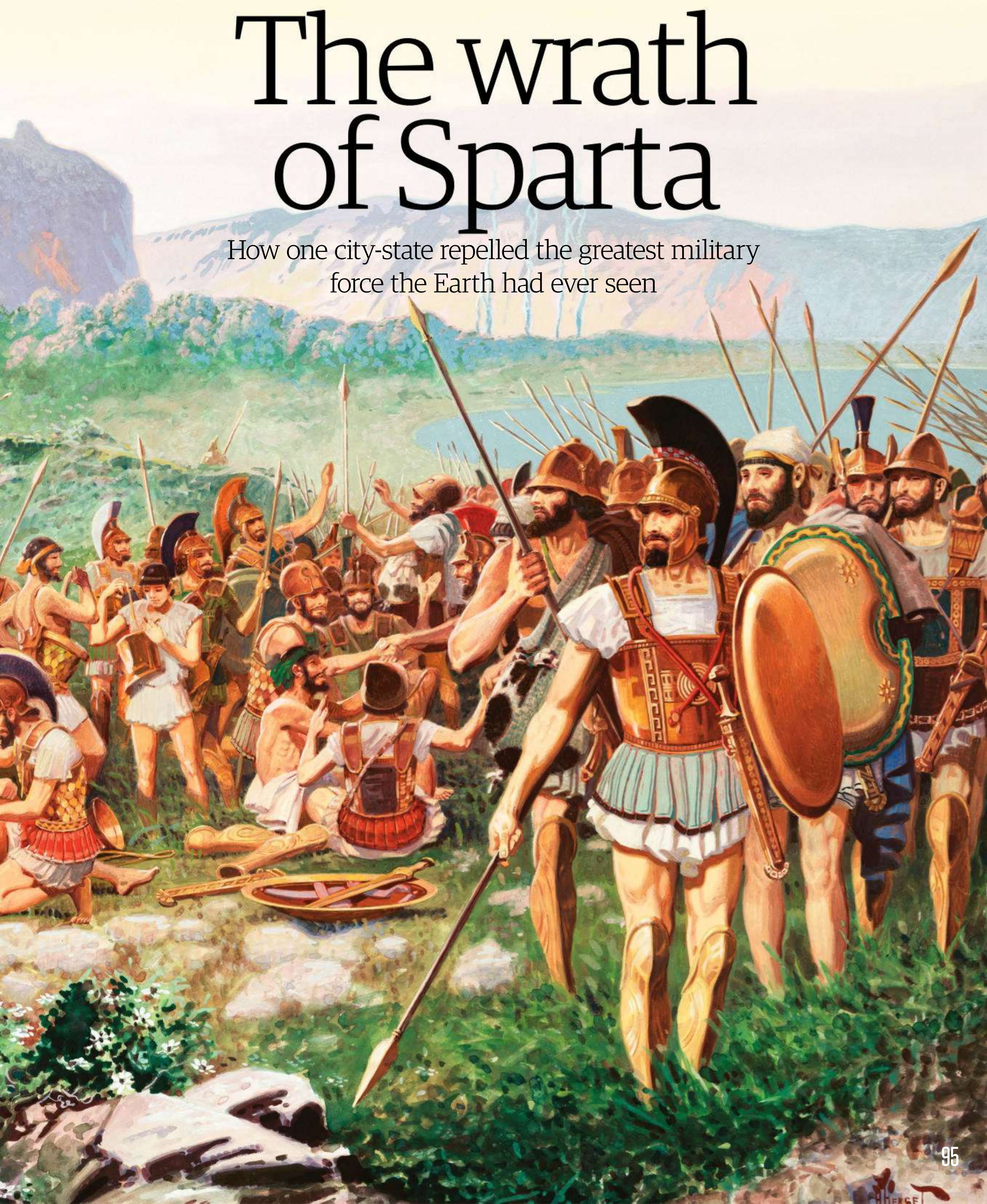
540-480 BCE

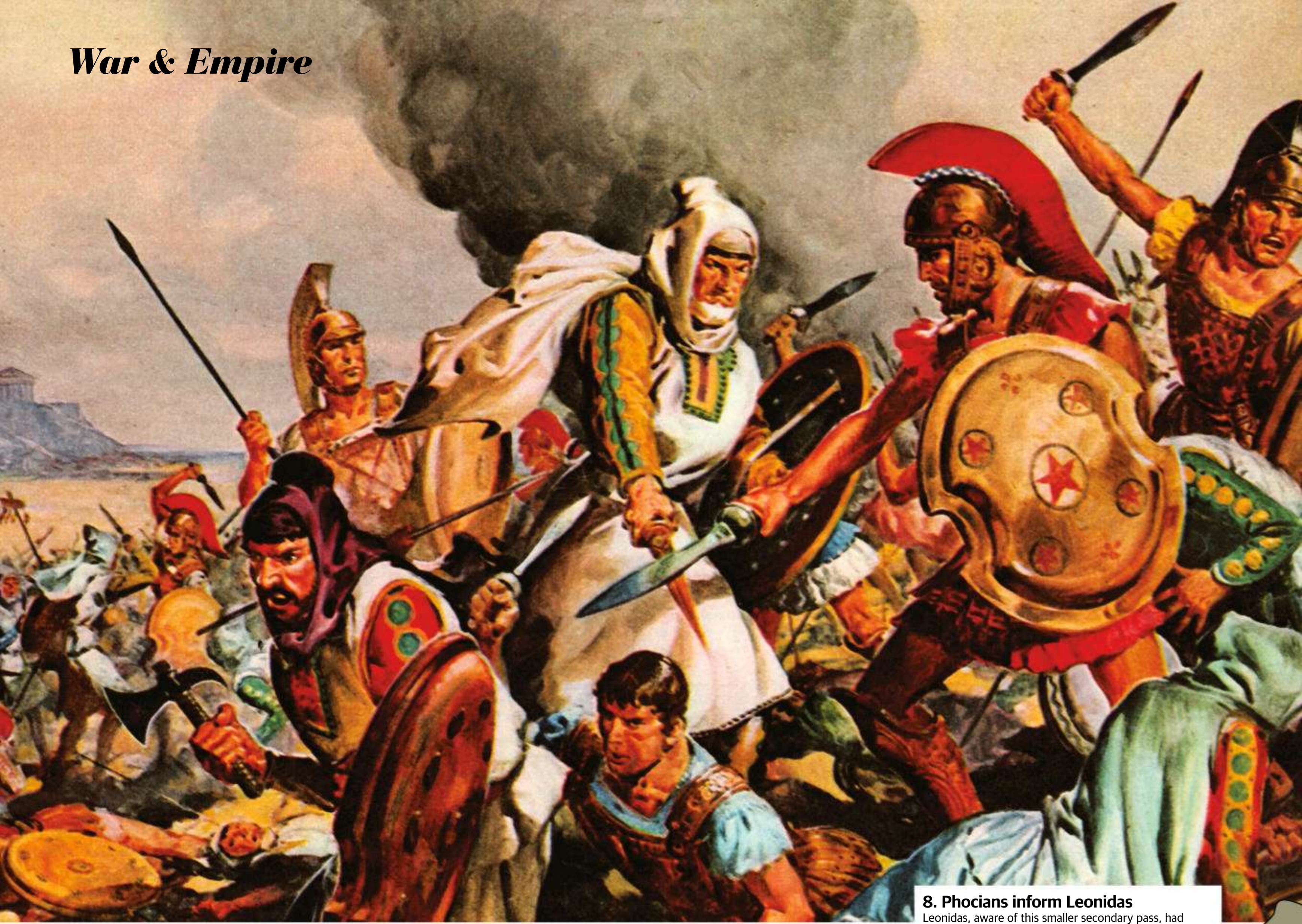
Brief Bio

Leading the Spartan resistance was the warrior-king Leonidas I, also known as Leonidas the Brave. As typical of Spartan rulers, he was an expert fighter and claimed to be descended from Ancient Greek hero Heracles, from who he possessed similar attributes of strength and guile. Leonidas famously led a band of 300 Spartans to the narrow coastal path of Thermopylae, which garnered the name of the 'Hot Gates', to face the might of the vast army of Xerxes I, who was leading the second Persian invasion of Greece.

The wrath of Sparta

How one city-state repelled the greatest military force the Earth had ever seen





How hard would you fight if your home country was being invaded? Fiercely no doubt, but what would you do if it was by the largest military force that the world had ever seen? Well, if you were a Spartan, the most war-loving, brutal and savage city-state in the entirety of Greece, then you would fight – and you would do so to the last man. That is exactly what King Leonidas I of Sparta did in 480 BCE and, despite falling in battle, he fell a free man on his home country's soil and helped repel the Persians from mainland Greece once and for all.

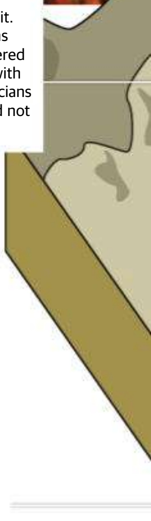
The second Persian invasion of Greece was catalysed by the spectacular failure of the first, with the then Persian king Darius I seeing his desire to subjugate the city-states of Athens and Eretria end brutally at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. Indeed, despite sending over 300,000 soldiers to take down the Persian's western enemy, the majority of Greece – and certainly the mainland – remained firmly out of Persian hands, with Darius himself checked in his empire's expansion for the first time. After receiving the news of the defeat, however, his will remained intact, and he began preparations for an even larger second invasion.

Unfortunately, while his will remained strong his body did not, with Darius dying four years later during the army's assembly in 486 BCE. The control of the world's largest empire fell to his son Xerxes I, who six years later set out to finish what his father had started. Partly blaming the Greeks for his father's perceived premature death, Xerxes drew the finest warriors from across his vast empire, including the largest contingent of Persian Immortals – their legendary elite warriors – that had ever been amassed. With an army over twice that of his father, Xerxes set sail.

The Battle of Thermopylae in August 480 BCE may not have been the turning point in the second invasion of Greece by the Persian Empire, but it was certainly representative of why King Xerxes I of Persia eventually had to withdraw from his planned conquest of the country and return unceremoniously to Asia defeated. By combining their forces and fighting for their country, the independent city-states of Greece truly demonstrated that numbers are not everything in war, as well as that tactics and ideological desire are both key in deciding the outcome of any conflict.

And talking of numbers, with regards to Xerxes' vast Persian invading army, we are talking serious

> "By combining their forces, the city-states of Greece demonstrated that numbers are not everything in war"



8. Phocians inform Leonidas

Leonidas, aware of this smaller secondary pass, had left a small group of Phocian troops behind to guard it. At daybreak on the third day of battle, these Phocians awoke to a terrible surprise: the Persians had discovered the path somehow and were surrounding Leonidas with a vast force. A runner was quickly sent from the Phocians to the Spartan king to inform him that the path could not be held and that they were being outflanked.

9. The last stand

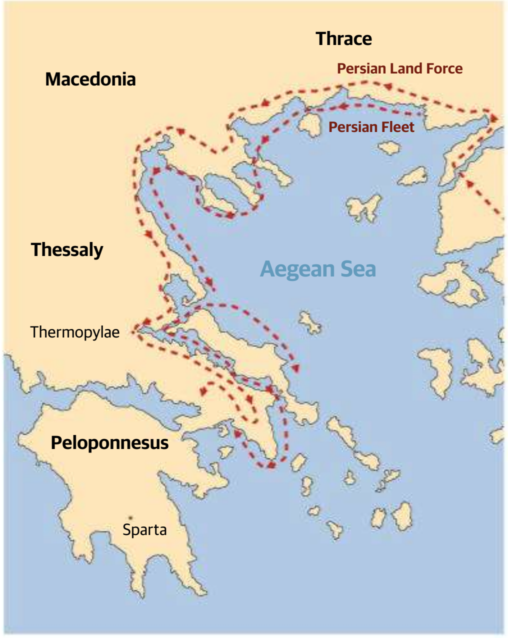
Surrounded and outnumbered, Leonidas and his Spartans were assaulted by Persian archers from the Hot Gates' flanks and an infantry force of 10,000 men from the front. Realising that they would not survive, Leonidas ordered that combat be taken to Persians in the wider part of the pass, as that way more could be killed by their small force. In this final bloody and brutal fighting, two of Xerxes' brothers, Abrocomes and Hyperanthes, were killed, as well as Leonidas himself after being targeted by the flanking Persian archers. The remaining Greek forces fought bravely, but all were eventually killed. Following the deaths of around 20,000 of his men to the Greek's 2,000, the Hot Gates were now passable to Xerxes, albeit at a bloody cost.

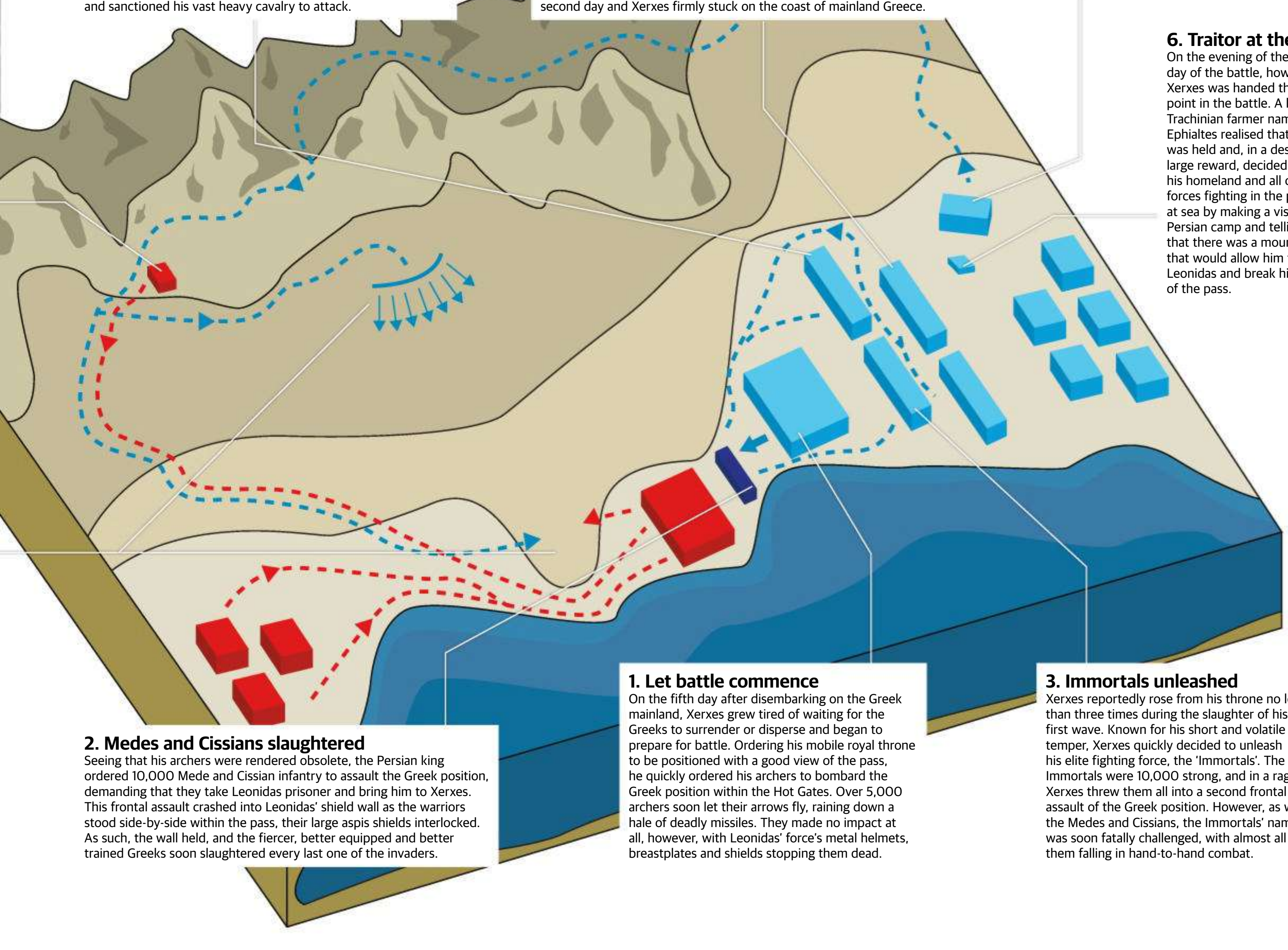
numbers – a force that according to ancient sources consisted of over 1 million men, and even according to modern sources was hundreds of thousands of people strong. This force landed at the coastal pass of Thermopylae on the Malian Gulf of Greece intent on plundering the land of its natural resources and people, not to mention adding the ancient civilisation to its seemingly ever-expanding and unstoppable empire. Combating this gigantic army was a combined force of just over 10,000 Greek hoplites, the elite warriors of the nation's city-states.

On paper, this discrepancy in numbers between the two forces makes the outcome seem a forgone conclusion, but for three days of fierce fighting it was not so, with the Greeks, led by Leonidas, holding Xerxes' Persian army. Thermopylae, which translates as the 'Hot Gates', is a narrow coastal pass leading from the Malian Gulf to mainland Greece. It is also – and this was crucial – the only main entrance through which a large army could pass. The Greeks knew this and, after realising that Xerxes was to land there, dispatched Leonidas and their defensive force to intercept and hold him in the pass of the Hot Gates while the Athenian navy combated the accompanying Persian fleet.

That naval engagement was the Battle of Artemisium, a planned tactical ambush of the Persian fleet at the Straits of Artemisium that – like Leonidas' defence of the Hot Gates – was chosen by the Athenian general Themistocles, as it would effectively multiply the effectiveness of the 270-ship strong Greek navy against their significantly larger counterparts. Indeed, as the Persians outnumbered the Greeks on land, so too did they at sea, with the Persian fleet totalling over 800 ships in all. In fact, when Xerxes set sail for Greece, the fleet originally numbered over 1,200 ships, however, after getting caught in a fierce storm off the coast of Magnesia, that number was reduced by a third, with thousands of Persians drowning at sea.

The remaining Persian fleet therefore approached Artemisium towards the end of summer depleted, but still with four times the ships of the combined might of the Greek city-states. After sailing directly





4. The terrible wrath of Persia
Despite only handfuls of Greek warriors falling during the first day of combat compared to the thousands of Persian losses, Xerxes believed that on the second day a further frontal assault would be too much for the small Greek force, overwhelming them due to exhaustion and inflicted wounds. He was wrong. After launching a further frontal assault on the Greek position and watching thousands more of his men fall, he flew into a rage and sanctioned his vast heavy cavalry to attack.

5. Cavalry charge
The heavy cavalry attacked and combat proceeded for the entirety of the second day, with thousands of Persians and hundreds of Greeks falling in battle. Leonidas kept casualties down in the Greek force by rotating the men at the front of the shield wall, ensuring that those engaging with the Persians were constantly battle-fresh. A series of feigned flight tactics also ate into the Persian cavalry and infantry greatly, leaving the Hot Gates still in Greek control at the end of the second day and Xerxes firmly stuck on the coast of mainland Greece.

7. Hydarnes despatched
Xerxes quickly despatched Ephialtes and Hydarnes, his foremost commander that still lived, to travel the path with 20,000 of his men. The path led from the east of the Persian camp along the ridge of Mount Anopaea and behind the cliffs that flanked the pass where Leonidas was positioned.

6. Traitor at the Gates
On the evening of the second day of the battle, however, Xerxes was handed the turning point in the battle. A local Trachinian farmer named Ephialtes realised that Xerxes was held and, in a desire for a large reward, decided to betray his homeland and all of the Greek forces fighting in the pass and at sea by making a visit to the Persian camp and telling Xerxes that there was a mountain path that would allow him to outflank Leonidas and break his blockade of the pass.

1. Let battle commence
On the fifth day after disembarking on the Greek mainland, Xerxes grew tired of waiting for the Greeks to surrender or disperse and began to prepare for battle. Ordering his mobile royal throne to be positioned with a good view of the pass, he quickly ordered his archers to bombard the Greek position within the Hot Gates. Over 5,000 archers soon let their arrows fly, raining down a hale of deadly missiles. They made no impact at all, however, with Leonidas' force's metal helmets, breastplates and shields stopping them dead.

3. Immortals unleashed
Xerxes reportedly rose from his throne no less than three times during the slaughter of his first wave. Known for his short and volatile temper, Xerxes quickly decided to unleash his elite fighting force, the 'Immortals'. The Immortals were 10,000 strong, and in a rage Xerxes threw them all into a second frontal assault of the Greek position. However, as with the Medes and Cissians, the Immortals' name was soon fatally challenged, with almost all of them falling in hand-to-hand combat.

2. Medes and Cissians slaughtered
Seeing that his archers were rendered obsolete, the Persian king ordered 10,000 Mede and Cissian infantry to assault the Greek position, demanding that they take Leonidas prisoner and bring him to Xerxes. This frontal assault crashed into Leonidas' shield wall as the warriors stood side-by-side within the pass, their large aspis shields interlocked. As such, the wall held, and the fiercer, better equipped and better trained Greeks soon slaughtered every last one of the invaders.

into the straits, however, they were violently ambushed. And so began what would end up being one of the most epic three-day naval battles in all of history. At first, the combination of the Greek navy's tactics, such as preventing Persian flanking manoeuvres with a novel flared-crescent formation, used the element of surprise to negate the Persians' superior seamanship, with 30 ships of their fleet sent on their way to the bottom of the ocean with minimal Greek losses. In fact, these casualties, on top of the poor state of some of their surviving fleet after the Magnesia storm, meant that the start of the second day of the battle contained minimal activity, with the Persians hanging back in order to make much-needed repairs.

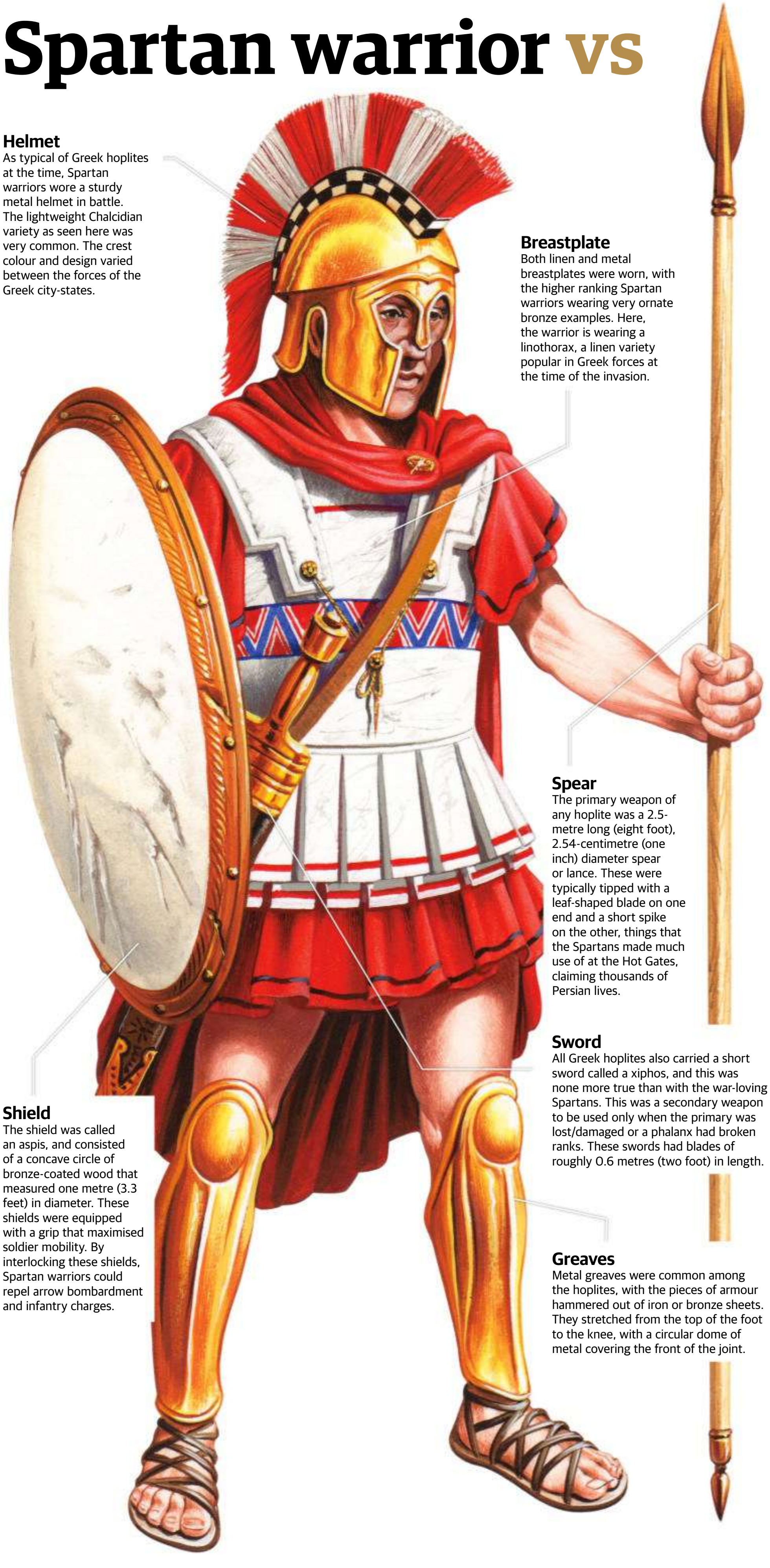
The Greek navy exploited this inactivity on the afternoon of the second day by hunting down a Persian patrol fleet and destroying them totally, with news of the losses quickly spreading throughout the Persian navy. Angered by their losses and now repositioned to best counter the Greeks, the Persians then attacked with full force on the morning of the third day of the battle, with hundreds of ships smashing into the Greek naval lines in a countering semi-circle formation. Now at liberty to display their superior nautical skills, the Persian sailors soon started to get a grip on the battle, with significant losses inflicted in an inferno of Greek and Persian fire. As the flames licked higher throughout the third day, all attempts at tactical positioning were rendered futile, with a marine melee ensuring that by the time night fell and the two fleets had disengaged, over 200 Persian ships and 100 Greek ships had fallen to Poseidon's domain.

So far the Persian fleet had been checked. However, this came at a great cost, with over a third of the Greek navy being destroyed in battle. The Straits had been successfully held though – just like the Hot Gates needed to be held by Leonidas.

Across the sea from the war-weary Greek navy, the main event was about to get underway. Just like at Artemisium, the Greek plan was simple yet – they hoped – beautifully effective. By forcing Xerxes' forces into the narrow pass, their superior numbers could be rendered obsolete, with only a set number of them capable of engaging Leonidas' Spartans et al at one time. Indeed, this tactic acted as a force multiplier for the Greeks, and led to one of the most famous military defences of all time, with Leonidas claiming tens of thousands of Persian lives with just the loss of 2,000 Greeks (for a comprehensive step-by-step account of the battle, see the annotated map on page 111).

> "The invasion of the largest military force the world had ever seen had been repelled"

Spartan warrior vs



Helmet
As typical of Greek hoplites at the time, Spartan warriors wore a sturdy metal helmet in battle. The lightweight Chalcidian variety as seen here was very common. The crest colour and design varied between the forces of the Greek city-states.

Breastplate
Both linen and metal breastplates were worn, with the higher ranking Spartan warriors wearing very ornate bronze examples. Here, the warrior is wearing a linothorax, a linen variety popular in Greek forces at the time of the invasion.

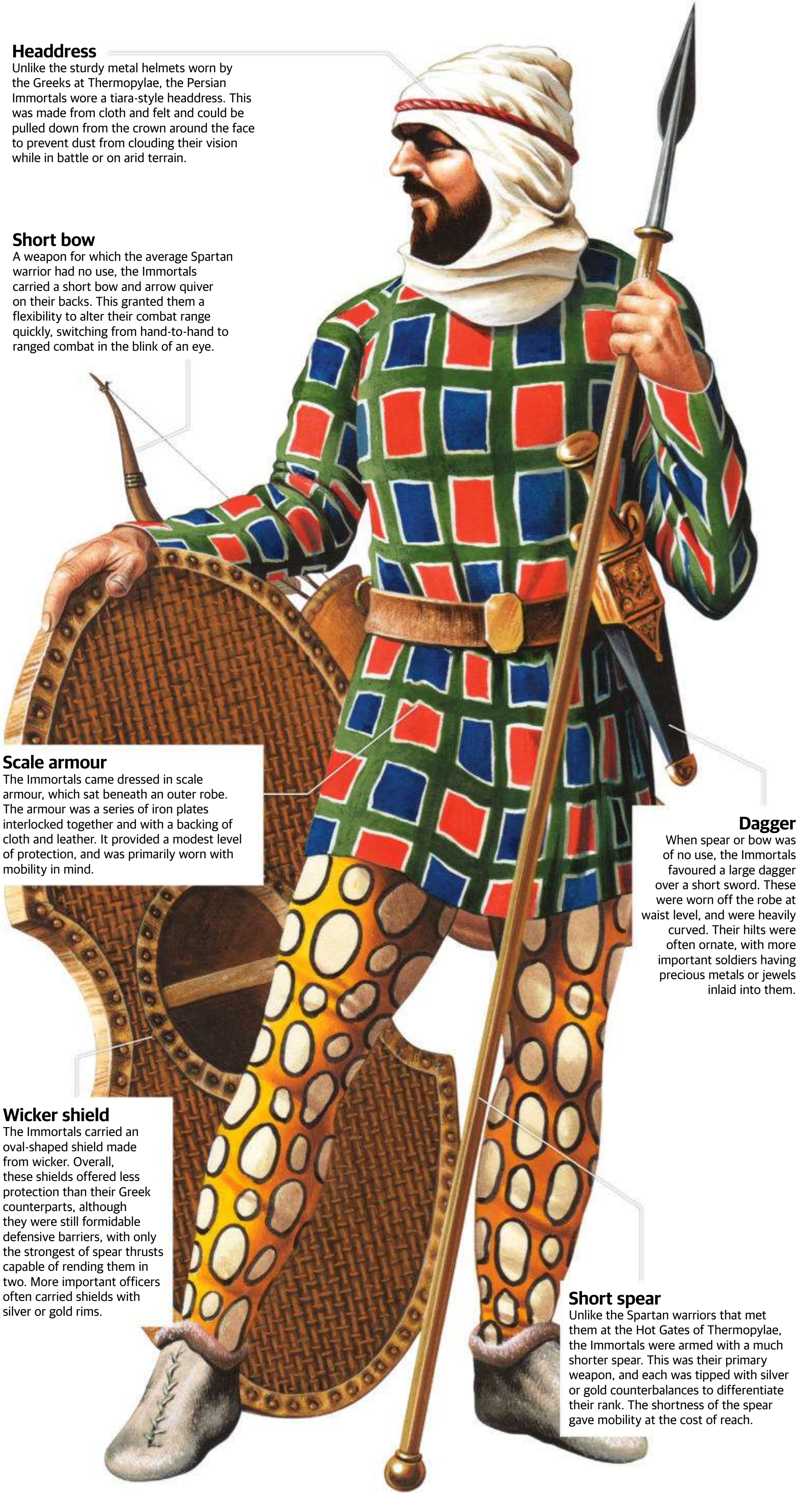
Spear
The primary weapon of any hoplite was a 2.5-metre long (eight foot), 2.54-centimetre (one inch) diameter spear or lance. These were typically tipped with a leaf-shaped blade on one end and a short spike on the other, things that the Spartans made much use of at the Hot Gates, claiming thousands of Persian lives.

Sword
All Greek hoplites also carried a short sword called a xiphos, and this was none more true than with the war-loving Spartans. This was a secondary weapon to be used only when the primary was lost/damaged or a phalanx had broken ranks. These swords had blades of roughly 0.6 metres (two foot) in length.

Shield
The shield was called an aspis, and consisted of a concave circle of bronze-coated wood that measured one metre (3.3 feet) in diameter. These shields were equipped with a grip that maximised soldier mobility. By interlocking these shields, Spartan warriors could repel arrow bombardment and infantry charges.

Greaves
Metal greaves were common among the hoplites, with the pieces of armour hammered out of iron or bronze sheets. They stretched from the top of the foot to the knee, with a circular dome of metal covering the front of the joint.

Persian Immortal



Headdress
Unlike the sturdy metal helmets worn by the Greeks at Thermopylae, the Persian Immortals wore a tiara-style headdress. This was made from cloth and felt and could be pulled down from the crown around the face to prevent dust from clouding their vision while in battle or on arid terrain.

Short bow
A weapon for which the average Spartan warrior had no use, the Immortals carried a short bow and arrow quiver on their backs. This granted them a flexibility to alter their combat range quickly, switching from hand-to-hand to ranged combat in the blink of an eye.

Scale armour
The Immortals came dressed in scale armour, which sat beneath an outer robe. The armour was a series of iron plates interlocked together and with a backing of cloth and leather. It provided a modest level of protection, and was primarily worn with mobility in mind.

Dagger
When spear or bow was of no use, the Immortals favoured a large dagger over a short sword. These were worn off the robe at waist level, and were heavily curved. Their hilts were often ornate, with more important soldiers having precious metals or jewels inlaid into them.

Wicker shield
The Immortals carried an oval-shaped shield made from wicker. Overall, these shields offered less protection than their Greek counterparts, although they were still formidable defensive barriers, with only the strongest of spear thrusts capable of rending them in two. More important officers often carried shields with silver or gold rims.

Short spear
Unlike the Spartan warriors that met them at the Hot Gates of Thermopylae, the Immortals were armed with a much shorter spear. This was their primary weapon, and each was tipped with silver or gold counterbalances to differentiate their rank. The shortness of the spear gave mobility at the cost of reach.

The amount of damage Leonidas managed to inflict with his elite Spartan warriors – the toughest, best-trained and most combat-savage of all Greek warriors – was immense and cannot be understated. Leading the defence of the Greek shield wall, these Spartans earned their passage to the afterlife with a combat prowess loaded with a lifetime's gathering of hatred, blood and skull-crushing steel, impaling, cleaving, rending and splitting Persian bone and body in a series of actions akin to those of the demon-minions of Hades, the Greek lord of hell. The Persians who were sent against this wall of hatred were not just checked, but totally obliterated, their corpses stacked in a grotesque barrier to Xerxes' progress.

Despite the wrath of Sparta being unleashed, for Leonidas and a brave rear-guard force of around 1,000 Greeks, the Battle of Thermopylae ended in death, with the warrior-king famously betrayed by one of his own. However, he and his men's actions and sacrifice acted as a catalyst to the remaining Greek forces. It united the typically unruly, warring and independent city-states in the defence of their country, showing that the Persians were not unbeatable and that their infamous Immortals, supposedly unkillable elite warriors, could indeed bleed and pass screaming into the Persian underworld of Duzakh.

Greek scouts, retreating along with the bulk of Leonidas' force, immediately relayed the failure to hold the Gates not just to the surviving Greek navy, but also to every city-state in Greece, leading to the evacuation of many, including the capital city of Athens. Themistocles, learning of the failure to hold the Gates, quickly ordered the waters of Artemisium to be evacuated forthwith, realising that without the Gates their defence of the Straits was futile. As such, on the fourth day of the Battle of Artemisium the Greek navy retreated north to the Straits of Salamis in an attempt to regroup and replan. Despite the heroic efforts of Leonidas, his Spartans and the thousands of Greek soldiers who had fought to repel the Persians all now seemed for nothing. As history shows, however, the Greeks were down, but not out.

Following the events of Thermopylae, Xerxes' troops made some headway into Greece – even taking and ransacking Athens itself – but a month later his fleet was trapped at Salamis by the Greeks, where it was left severely depleted after a combined naval assault. This left Xerxes with insufficient ships, men and crucially the will to continue the conquest, and they were forced to retreat back to Asia. By the time the Persian king's force had returned to their homeland, almost all of his once colossal army had died of sickness or starvation, and so the invasion of the largest military force the world had ever seen had been repelled. A few more battles between the Greeks and Persians followed, but the East's expansion into the West had been fatally hindered by Thermopylae – and Sparta, the city-state that led the resistance, remained a beacon of what can be achieved if ideals are chased and never compromised.

© Look and Learn; Ian Jackson

Houses divided to the death

The long, costly Peloponnesian War brought Athens to its knees, and left a weakened Sparta to exert temporal preeminence in the Greek world

In the aftermath of their stunning victory against the invading Persians in the early 5th century BCE, the cooperative spirit among the Greek city-states rapidly ebbed. Although they had come together to fight the common enemy, the rivalry that simmered beneath the surface emerged with renewed vigour in the decades that followed. The principal city-states of Athens and Sparta coexisted in an atmosphere of mutual distrust and antipathy.

With its martial tradition and the proven prowess of its professional army on the battlefield, Sparta reigned preeminent on land. Athens, in turn, had become the strongest naval power in the Mediterranean basin, challenged only slightly by the naval strength of another city-state, Corinth. The Athenian navy essentially served as a security force against raiding pirates and seaborne invasion of the Greek realm by other powers. While both Sparta and Athens gathered allies together, each warily eyed the other. The Spartans formed the Peloponnesian League, which included principally Thebes, Corinth, Elis and Tegea, along with numerous other city-states. Athens brought the Delian League together, including numerous city-states of Ionia in present-day Turkey.

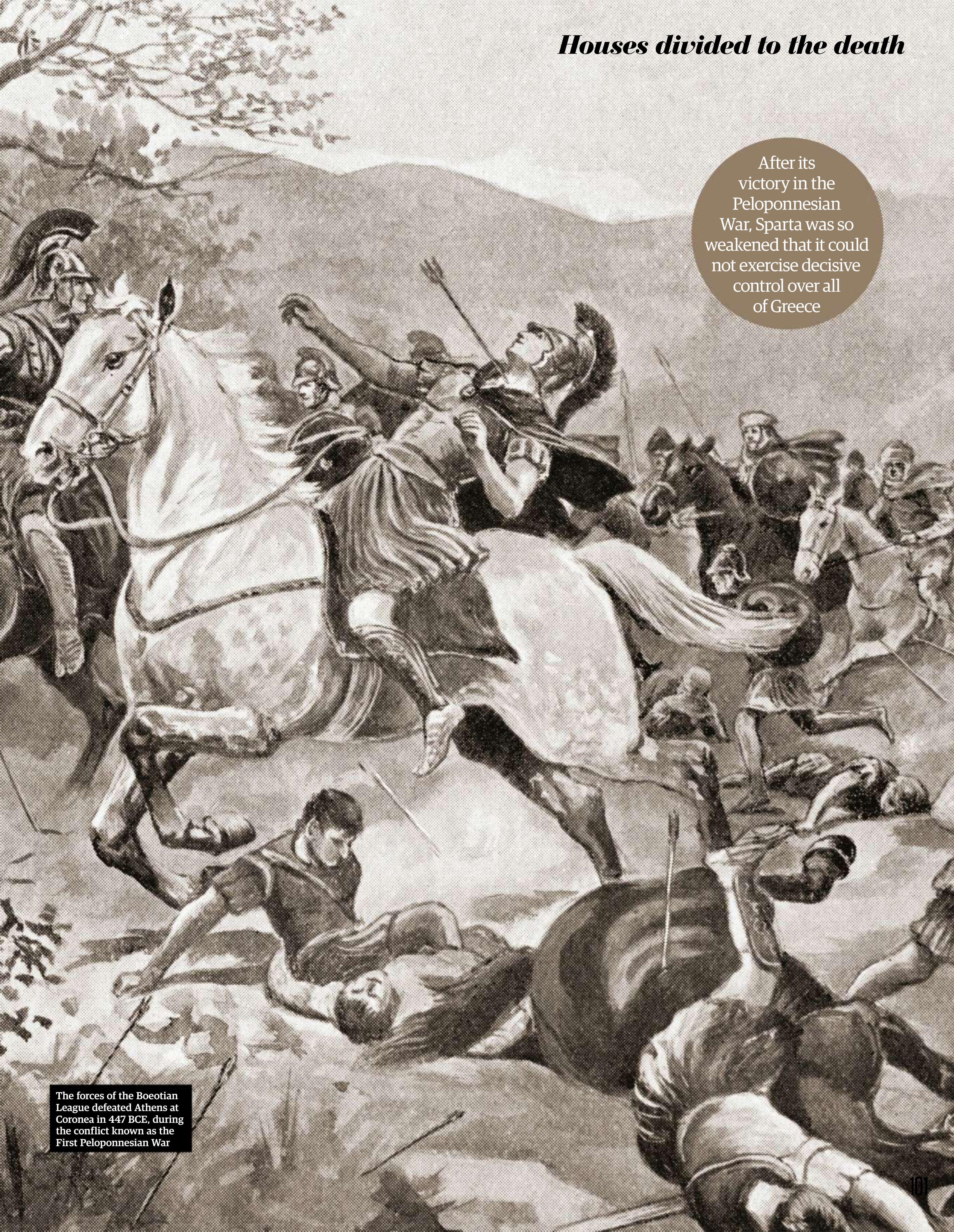
RIVALRY RENEWED

As both Sparta and Athens expanded their respective spheres of influence, Athens appeared ascendant for two reasons. Its strong navy allowed the Athenians to assert an aura of protectionism within the Delian League. In time, the league assumed the posture of an Athenian empire rather than a cooperative alliance of equals. Along with its protectionist status, Athens also justified the levying of tributes from the other members of the Delian League.

Athens amassed immense wealth, and sought to enhance its security by rebuilding a pair of 'Long Wall' fortifications that protected the city's direct supply route to the port of Piraeus. If threatened on land, the Athenians reasoned, they could be resupplied by sea from their far-flung empire, and send their fleet to raid enemy settlements. The Spartans considered the rebuilding of the Long Walls a provocation, and concluded that the threat of Athenian domination of the entire Eastern Mediterranean should be opposed at all costs.

Negotiations took place periodically, but neither side was completely satisfied. Skirmishes broke out between neighbouring city-states, while Sparta and Athens sought to exploit any weakness displayed by the other. A chink in the Peloponnesian League's armour occurred in 459 BCE, as two Spartan allies, Megara and Corinth, went to war. Athens took advantage of the fighting to conclude an alliance with Megara, gaining a toehold on the isthmus where Corinth was located, and sparking the conflict that some scholars refer to as the First Peloponnesian War. The Spartans retaliated with an invasion of the Attica Peninsula, threatening Athens itself. Under growing pressure

> Athens utilised hoplite foot soldiers and naval vessels cooperatively during the Peloponnesian War



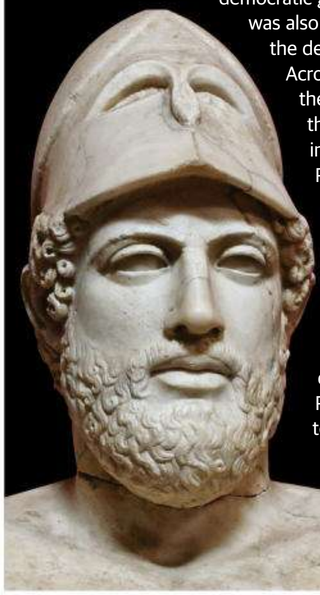
After its victory in the Peloponnesian War, Sparta was so weakened that it could not exercise decisive control over all of Greece

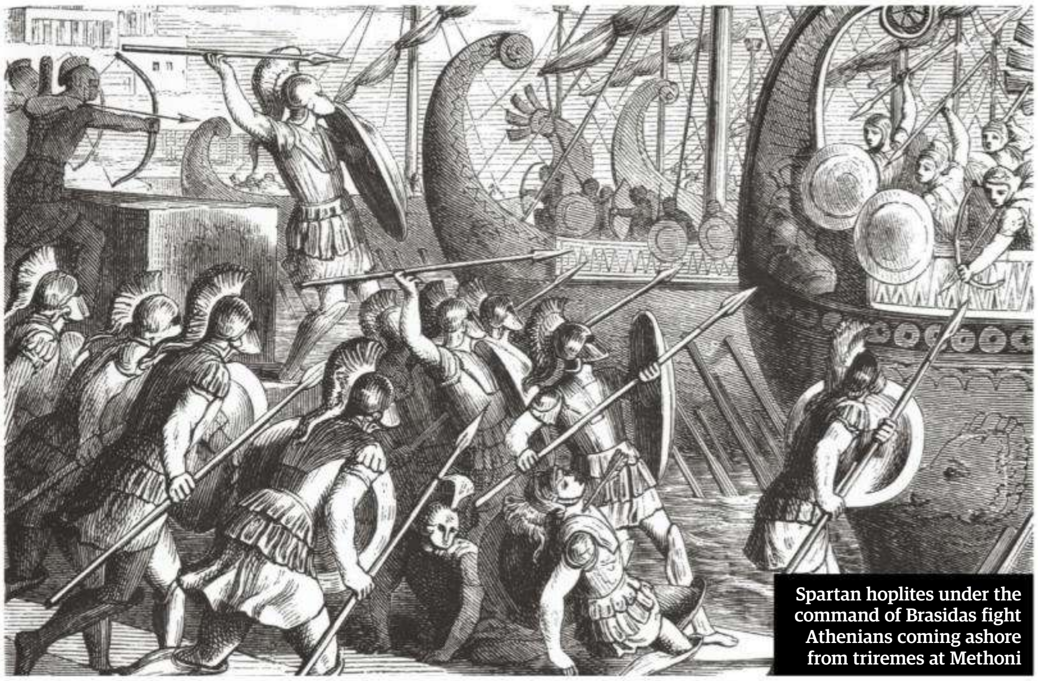
The forces of the Boeotian League defeated Athens at Coronea in 447 BCE, during the conflict known as the First Peloponnesian War

First citizen of Athens

While Pericles is remembered for his unwillingness to compromise with Sparta that precipitated the Peloponnesian War, his influence on the Athenian city-state and the greater Greek way of life during its golden age must be acknowledged. The ancient historian Thucydides called Pericles "the first citizen of Athens," and it was during his rule and period of great influence that the Delian League truly became an Athenian empire. Pericles was a competent military commander and orator, whose discourse rallied the Athenian people to great achievement during a period of more than three decades when he was the preeminent force in the city's political, military and cultural affairs.

Pericles was largely responsible for the ascent of Athens as the focus of the ancient world's cultural development. He was a patron of the arts and sciences, and promoted the theory of Athenian democratic government. He was also the catalyst for the development of the Acropolis, resulting in the construction of the great buildings, including the Parthenon, whose remains continue to stir the minds and hearts of people to the splendour of ancient Greece. At the time of his death in 429 BCE, Pericles is thought to have been at least 60 years old.





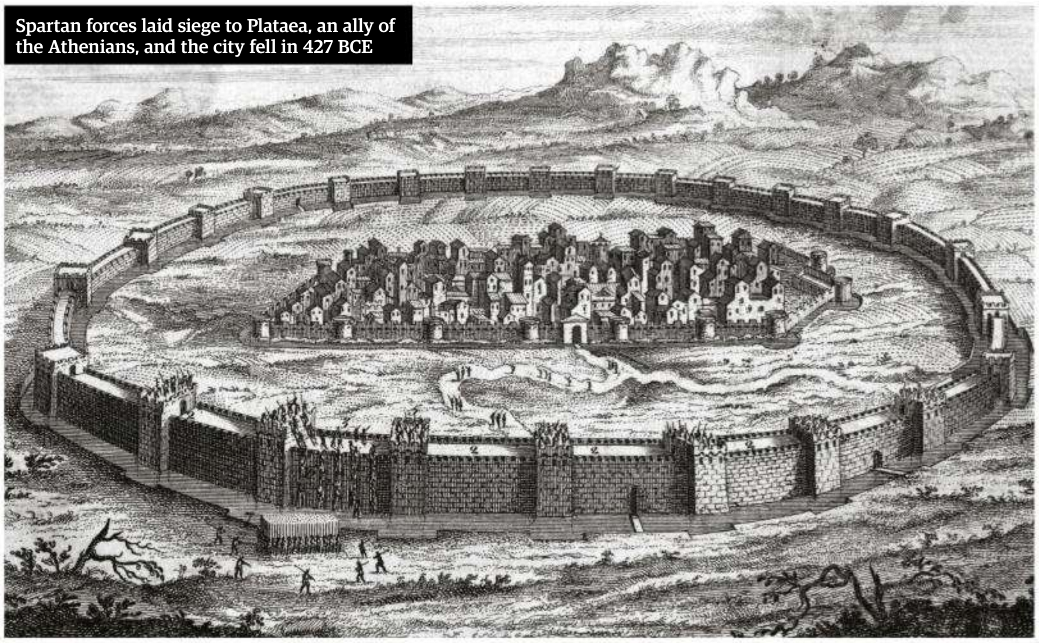
Spartan hoplites under the command of Brasidas fight Athenians coming ashore from triremes at Methoni

from the Spartan offensive, Athens abandoned its territorial gains. Early in 445 BCE, a tenuous truce was negotiated, as each of the major city-states acknowledged the other's sphere of influence. Although it was known as the Thirty Years' Peace, the deal provided only a veneer of lasting accord.

RESTIVE PEACE; TOTAL WAR

In 440 BCE, the city-state of Samos, an Athenian ally, sought to exit the so-called Delian League. Athens suppressed an armed insurrection in Samos, while Sparta and Corinth wrestled with the idea of intervention on behalf of the rebels. Such an overt act would have triggered a climactic war for supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. The principals of the Peloponnesian League, however, declined to intervene.

Spartan forces laid siege to Plataea, an ally of the Athenians, and the city fell in 427 BCE



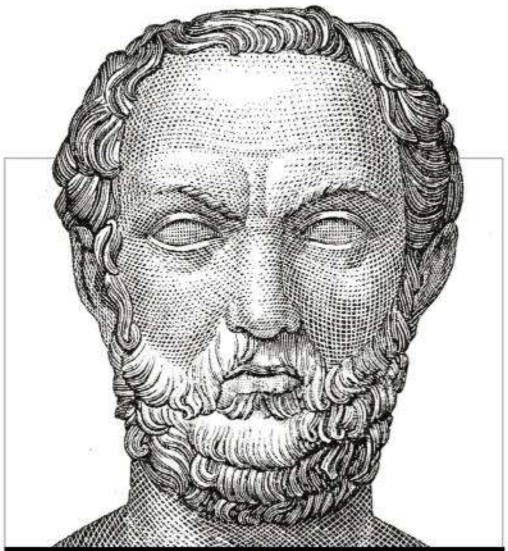
The affair concerning Samos was just one of several brushes with war that occurred following the Thirty Years' Peace accord. The colony of Korkyra later revolted against Corinth, and appealed for Athenian aid. A small fleet of Athenian warships supported the Korkyran navy, and the Battle of Sybota ended in a draw that thwarted any Corinthian plan to press a slight advantage and attack Korkyra itself.

The bad blood between Corinth and Athens was the catalyst for the Peloponnesian War that erupted in 431 BCE, and the flashpoint was the Corinthian colony of Poteidaia, which also had economic ties to Athens. The Athenians coveted raw materials like timber and rare minerals from Thrace, a region to the northeast astride the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits. Athens demanded that the Poteidaia people dismantle their defences to allow trade access. Poteidaia sent a plea to Sparta for help.

ARBITRATION TO ACTION

When its demands were not met, Athens concluded a formal alliance with Korkyra, and laid siege to Poteidaia, a direct threat to Corinthian security. The Spartans tried to avoid war, and suggested peace could be maintained through compromise. Pericles, a principal leader of the Athenians, urged rejection of the idea. At the same time, Thebes, an ally of the Spartans, attacked Plataea. When Athens refused to accept Sparta's overture and consent to arbitration to settle the dispute, total war broke out.

Sparta and the Peloponnesian League invaded Athens, and the Spartans appealed to Persia for assistance in ending a period of 'Athenian oppression'. The Spartans, under King Archidamus II, invaded the Attica Peninsula, and put much of the countryside to the torch. Pericles pursued a strategy of evasion, allowing the Spartans to ravage the land while his forces remained secure behind the Long Walls, defending Piraeus, the Athenian



The Greek historian Thucydides wrote the definitive account of the great struggle between Sparta and Athens during the Peloponnesian War

lifeline to the outside world. Athenian warships raided Spartan settlements, and fought indecisive actions with Sparta's smaller navy.

PERICLES AND THE PLAGUE

The strategy exercised by Pericles worked for a time, but then the close quarters of the defences and the Spartan toll on the Attica Peninsula proved his undoing. The losses in lives and wealth to the marauding Spartan army were substantial, and in 429 BCE, a great plague swept through Athens. Roughly one third of the city's population, including Pericles, perished in the epidemic.

While disease raged in the streets of Athens, the Spartans laid siege to Plataea, and that city fell in 427 BCE. But Spartan attacks against Athenian bases in the west were thrown back. Spartan attempts to aid forces on the island of Lesbos that had risen against Athens were also thwarted.

RESURGENT ATHENS

Battered but unbowed, Athens revived militarily in the wake of the disastrous plague. After putting down the insurrection on Lesbos, the Athenians even assumed the offensive, mounting an expedition against the city of Syracuse on the island of Sicily, and thrusting westward against Spartan positions while landing troops on the Peloponnesian Peninsula itself.

By 425 BCE, Sparta ironically found itself on the cusp of capitulation, and made peace overtures. However, the Spartans, led by Brasidas, won a much-needed victory at Chalcidice in 424 BCE, staving off defeat. Two years later, Brasidas was killed in the great Battle at Amphipolis, and the bellicose Athenian leader, Cleon, also died. With the death of Cleon, one of his Athenian political rivals, Nicias, prevailed on the Athenian leaders to accept Sparta's offer to end hostilities.

Approximately 40,000 Athenian soldiers were lost as part of Athens abortive expedition to conquer Sicily

In 421 BCE, the Peace of Nicias was concluded. For the next six years, major conflicts ceased, however, both Athens and Sparta recruited smaller city-states to their alliances, while minor clashes were common, as political manoeuvring caused tensions to mount once again.

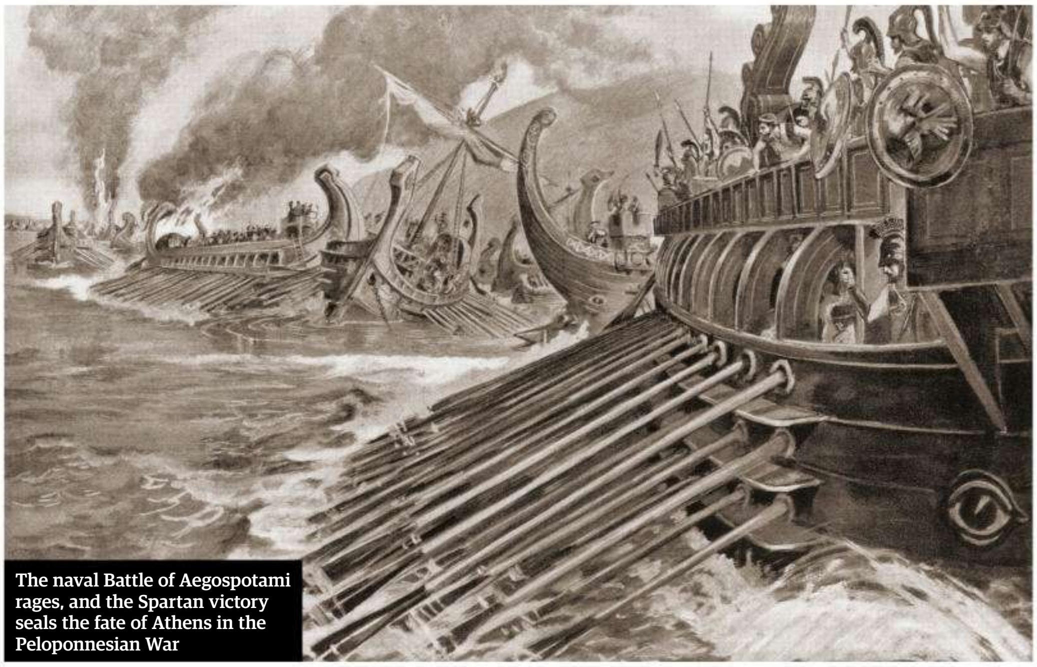
ATHENIAN AMBITION SHATTERED

In 415 BCE, the Athenians embarked on an ill-fated campaign to subdue all of Sicily. Eleven years of savage fighting ensued. The Athenians laid siege to Syracuse once again, and made gains initially before their momentum ebbed against mounting resistance, particularly highly effective Syracusan cavalry. Compounding the Athenian predicament, Sparta entered the conflict in 413 BCE, preventing additional reinforcement of the troops committed to the campaign. Eventually, the Athenian force in Sicily was annihilated. It was a blow from which Athens never fully recovered.

The Spartans invaded the Attica Peninsula again, pillaging the countryside anew. In 411 BCE, political turmoil in Athens resulted in the brief replacement of democratic government with a structure called the 'Five Thousand', but decisive Athenian naval action just short of an attack on the city itself restored the democracy.

The Athenian navy also won multiple victories against the Spartan fleet, as the focus of the war shifted to the sea. For a time, neither side could gain the upper hand. However, in 405 BCE, Spartan hero Lysander – aided substantially by the Persians – won the decisive victory of the war in the naval Battle of Aegospotami.

With its naval might vanquished, Athens was starved into submission by the spring of 404 BCE. The long, costly Peloponnesian War had weakened all of the Greek city-states, and the cultural, political and military influence of Athens waned.

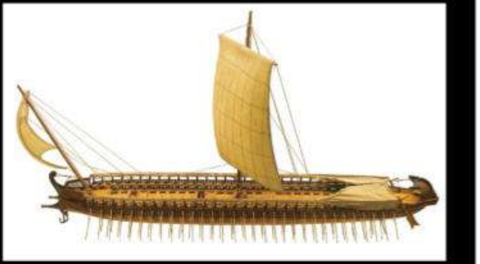


The naval Battle of Aegospotami rages, and the Spartan victory seals the fate of Athens in the Peloponnesian War

The Greek trireme

The weapon of decision at sea during the Peloponnesian War was the Greek trireme, a multi-purpose vessel that dominated the naval encounters in the Mediterranean from the 7th to 4th century BCE. The trireme was named for its three rows of 30 oars on each side, a total of 180 oarsmen propelling the vessel. Triremes were typically about 37 metres long, with a shallow draft of about one metre and a height above the waterline of just over two metres. A large, square sail was hoisted from the mainmast amidships, and a smaller foremast was similarly rigged. Steering was accomplished with a pair of rudders at the stern.

Constructed of light wood, the trireme could be beached to offload soldiers or secure for the night, and it is believed that as few as 140 men could lift its weight and bring the vessel ashore. Approximately 200 men formed the standard trireme's crew, and before a trireme entered combat both masts were taken down. The warships were fitted at the prow with heavy, bronze rams, whose impact could potentially shatter the hull of an enemy vessel. At the height of its power, the Athenian navy included more than 200 triremes.

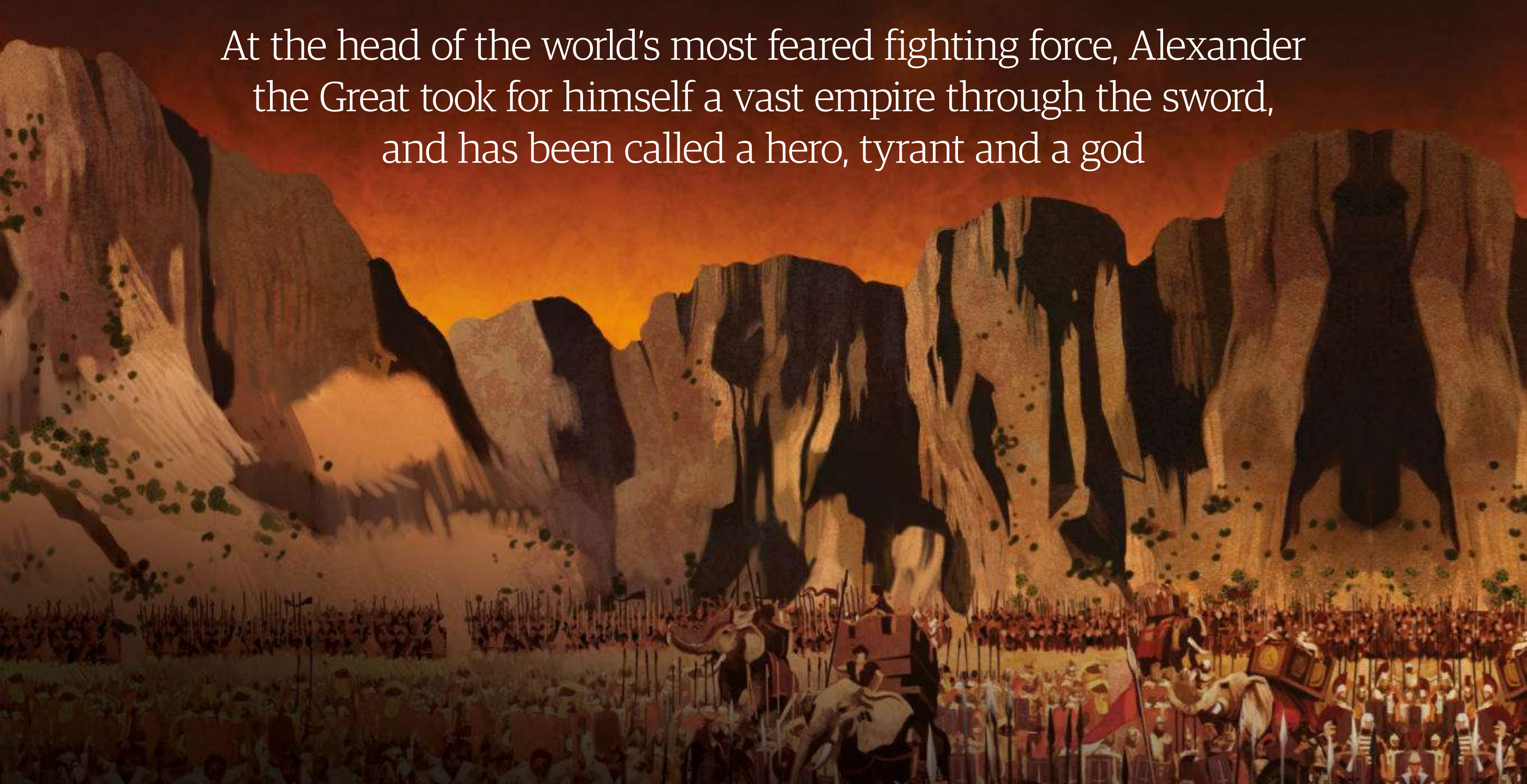


The sleek, sturdy Greek trireme was the primary weapon of war at sea during the Peloponnesian War

© Alamy.

Alexander the Great

At the head of the world's most feared fighting force, Alexander the Great took for himself a vast empire through the sword, and has been called a hero, tyrant and a god



The king died quickly, his white robes soaked red. The laughter and rejoicing of a royal marriage - the wedding of his daughter - had quickly turned to screams and wails of lament as Pausanias, a member of the king's personal guard, turned on his master, driving a dagger between his ribs. Tripping on a vine as he fled the scene for his getaway horse, the assassin was brutally stabbed to death by the furious spears of pursuing guards. Philip II died as he had lived: awash with blood and surrounded by intrigue. His legacy would leave bloody footprints across the whole of Central Asia and the Middle East.

Over a 23-year reign from 359 to 336 BCE, the king of Macedon - a mountainous land overlapping modern northern Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and Macedonia - had gone from ruler of a barbarous backwater of tribal highlanders to the overlord of the fractious Greek kingdoms and city-states. Bringing his rival monarchs in line through war, military alliance and marriage, Philip II had reformed the Macedonian army into one of the most feared fighting forces in the ancient world, with a view to bloodying their most hated foes, the Achaemenid Empire of Persia, which had humbled and humiliated the Greeks in the Greco-Persian Wars a century earlier. Aged just 20, Alexander III of Macedon - soon to be remembered as Alexander the Great - took the throne as the head of a military machine on the brink of war and legendary status, and gleefully drove it full throttle over the edge.

Alexander had been groomed for greatness from birth, but he was no pampered prince. Tutored by the austere Leonidas, who forbade all luxury, the general Lysimachus and the philosopher Aristotle, Alexander was proficient with weapons, horse riding and playing the lyre, and an expert in ethics, philosophy and the skills of debate. He trained daily in pankration, an Ancient Greek martial art, which focused on savage grapples, punches, kicks and choke holds. A Renaissance man before the Renaissance, he was schooled in the skills to conquer and the knowledge to rule. At 16 he had governed Macedon as regent while his father warred far from home, the young heir putting down rebellious tribes in Thrace and founding a whole new city, Alexandropolis - the first of many that would bear his name.

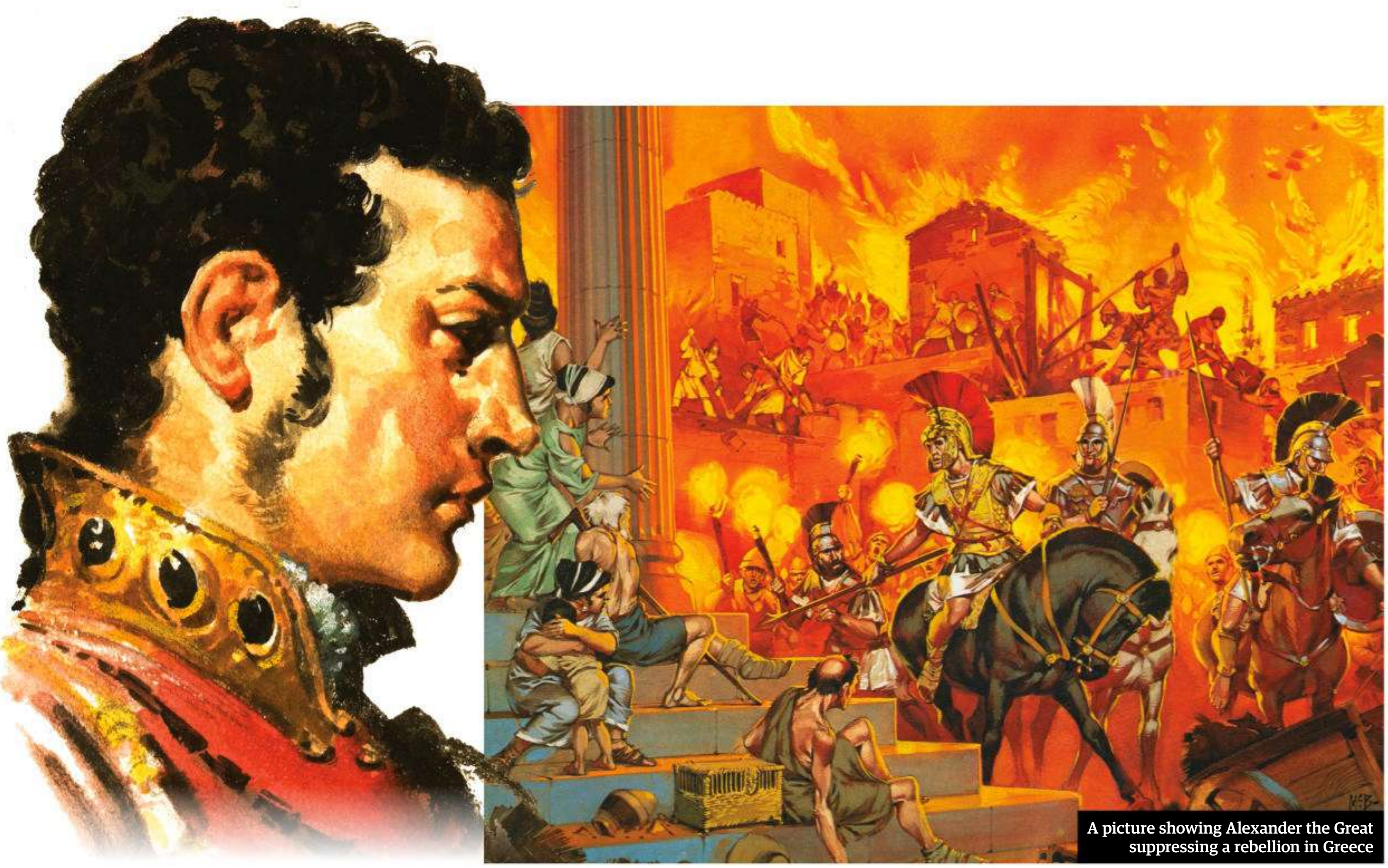
Like so many civilisations before and after them, the Ancient Greeks loved to gossip. Philip's death, they said, was an act of revenge from his scorned lover Pausanias, but two other people immediately benefitted: Olympias, mother of Alexander and once-favoured wife of Philip, had been in danger of losing her status to a younger bride; and Alexander himself, who promptly

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Greek, 356-323 BCE

Brief Bio

Becoming king of Macedon after his father's murder, Alexander led the Greeks into war against the powerful Persian Empire. With charisma and cunning, he led from the frontline to create an empire that stretched from Libya to India, creating a new golden age for Hellenic culture.



A picture showing Alexander the Great suppressing a rebellion in Greece

> "He trained in pankration – an Ancient Greek martial art, which focused on savage grapples, punches and kicks"

executed all other contenders for the crown and crushed rebellions across Greece. Olympias, too, set about consolidating her power, having Cleopatra Eurydice, her replacement as consort to the dead king, and her baby daughter burned alive.

The dubious heroes of myth were Alexander's own blueprint for greatness. With legendary figures on both sides of the family tree, it was hard not to be convinced of his own special destiny. His father's bloodline claimed descent from Hercules – the son of Zeus and bull-wrestling demigod of Twelve Labours fame – while his mother's family looked up to Achilles, the all-but-invulnerable champion of the fabled Siege of Troy. Omens and portents prefigured every decision, but as much as this ambitious new king gave every appearance of being a slave to destiny – looking for meaning in flights of birds and consulting oracles at every turn – he steered destiny himself, consciously building a legend that would lift his accomplishments well beyond those of his father and into the same world of the legendary journeys and heroic battles that had once inspired him. In just shy of a decade, he crushed the life out of the once-mighty Persian state and expanded the borders of his domain from Libya to India to create a mighty empire.

Fittingly, this conquest began with some mythical brand management. Picking up where Philip II's army of invasion had been poised, Alexander crossed the Dardanelles – the narrow channel connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and Europe from Asia Minor – in early 334 BCE with 47,000 soldiers and mercenaries from across Macedon and the Greek kingdoms. Leaping from his warship in full ceremonial armour, vast plumed helmet and golden breastplate, the emperor-to-be sent a spear whistling through the air to crash into the undefended soil of Asia Minor. It was the first blow in a war that would claim for Alexander over 500,000 square kilometres of land and leave between 75,000 and 200,000 dead.

The coastline of what is now Turkey was littered with Greek cities ruled by the Persian invaders, and of them Troy had particular significance for Alexander. The alleged site of his maternal ancestor Achilles' most celebrated victory and tragic death, Alexander carried with him on his journey the story of the Trojan War, Homer's epic *Iliad* (a gift from his tutor Aristotle), and quoted from it often. First, he had the tomb of Achilles opened so he could pay tribute, then riding to a nearby temple of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, the Macedon king was shown what they claimed were the weapons of Achilles. There, he took down a shield, replacing it with his own. Alexander wasn't merely content sharing a fanciful familial association with Achilles; he wanted to rival him, visiting this site of bloodshed and heroism, and taking the mantle of one of Ancient Greece's greatest heroes.

Was it a propaganda stunt that spurred on his army, or did he believe it? His fierce pragmatism and ambition would suggest both – a dangerous and unpredictable combination that made him one of the battlefield's most iconic generals.

First meeting the Persians in battle in 334 BCE, Alexander quickly established a formula for swift and decisive victory at the Battle of the Granicus, just outside of his beloved Troy. Leading from the front ranks, a feint drew the stronger Persian units and their battle-hardened Greek mercenaries out, spreading their line thin and allowing Alexander's cavalry to hammer through their scattered ranks. He was welcomed as a liberator by the Greek subjects of Asia Minor, and endeavoured to win over the local population too. Claiming to distrust tyrants, he appointed local rulers and allowed them relative independence, but with a new centralised tax system he ensured their autonomy was reliant upon his handouts.

With Persia's control of the vast expanse of Asia Minor resting on its superior navy, Alexander opted to scatter his own vessels rather than fight a sea war he couldn't win, and marched down the coast to take the enemy's largest naval port,

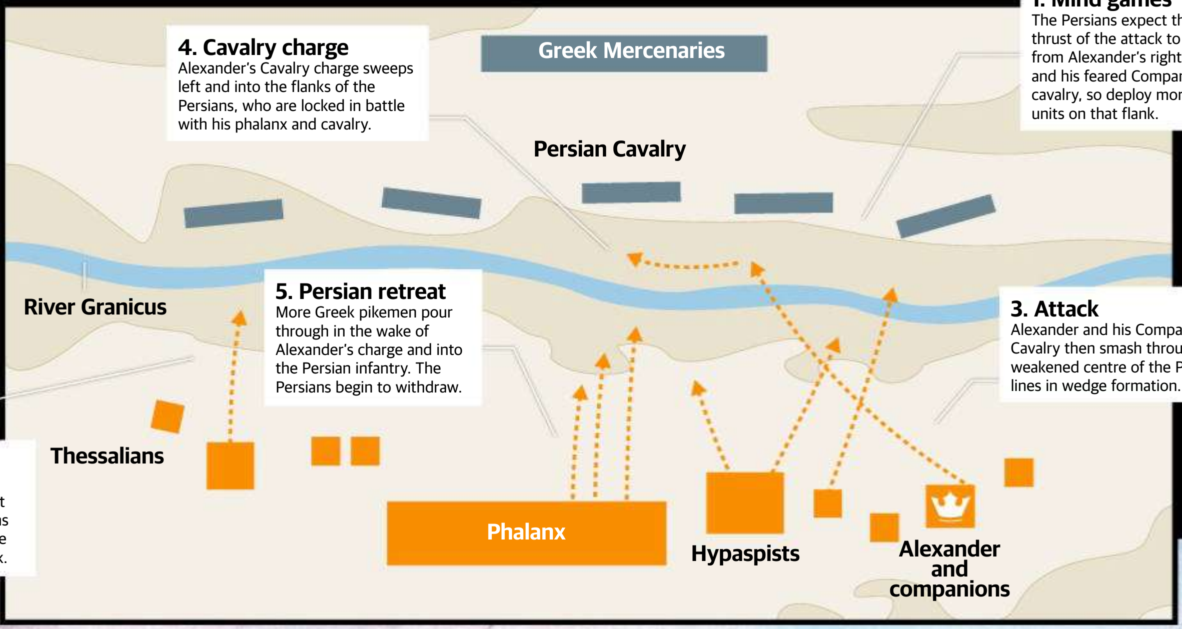
BATTLE OF THE GRANICUS (334 BCE)

Alexander's first victory against the Persian Empire

The first real clash between Persian troops and Alexander's newly minted invasion force remains the best example of his signature battle tactic.

Using heavy cavalry to prise apart the weakest part of the enemy line while his finely drilled infantry kept the bulk of the enemy tangled up on their spears, it relied upon the professionalism of Macedon's army, as well as the unique talents of its core units.

It showed that Alexander knew how best to use the forces that his father had amassed.



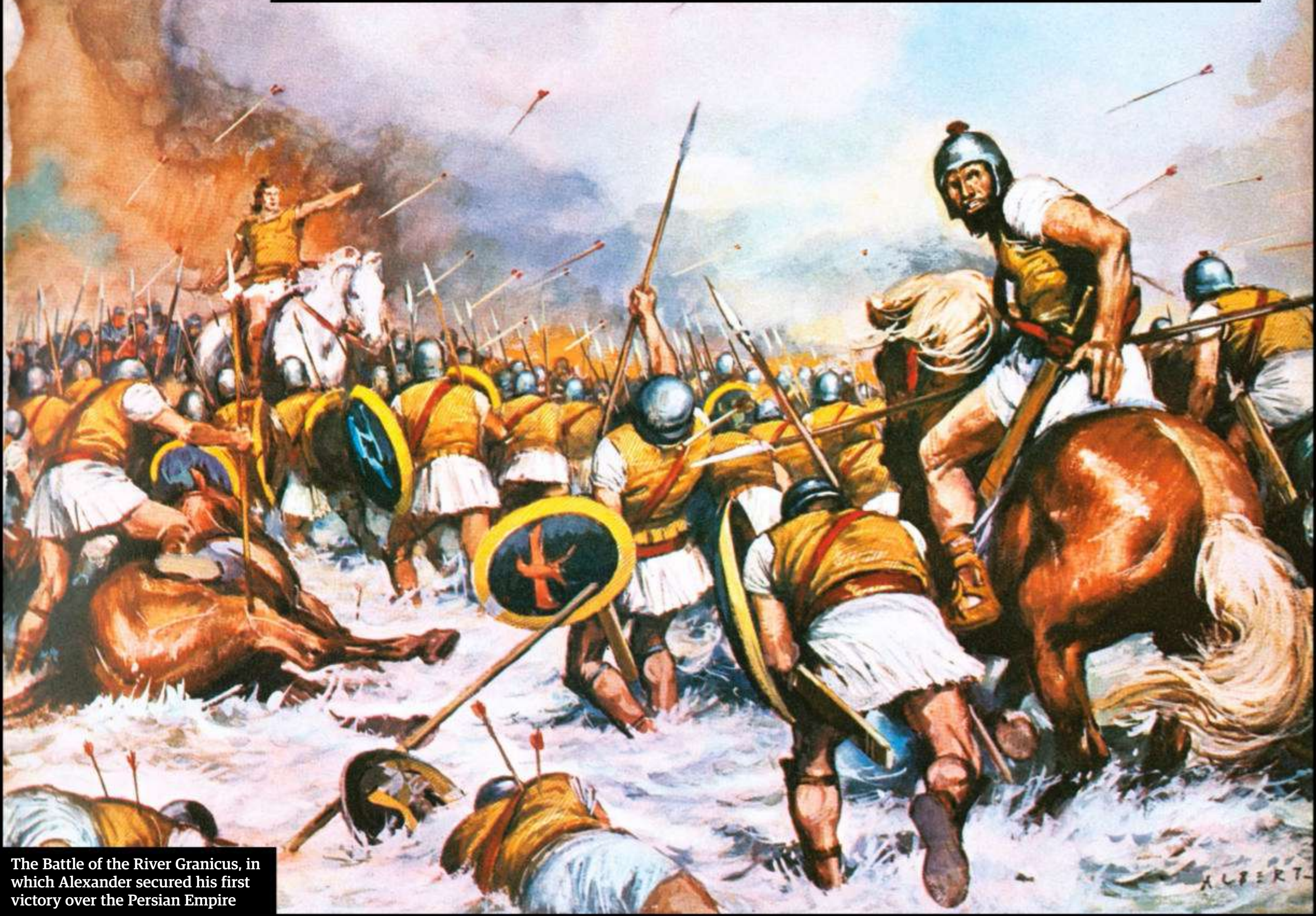
1. Mind games
The Persians expect the thrust of the attack to come from Alexander's right flank and his feared Companion cavalry, so deploy more units on that flank.

2. Feint
Alexander's Thessalian Cavalry and pikemen feint from the left. The Persians reinforce the line from the centre to drive them back.

3. Attack
Alexander and his Companion Cavalry then smash through the weakened centre of the Persian lines in wedge formation.

4. Cavalry charge
Alexander's Cavalry charge sweeps left and into the flanks of the Persians, who are locked in battle with his phalanx and cavalry.

5. Persian retreat
More Greek pikemen pour through in the wake of Alexander's charge and into the Persian infantry. The Persians begin to withdraw.



The Battle of the River Granicus, in which Alexander secured his first victory over the Persian Empire

Halicarnassus – now Bodrum in Turkey – by land, forcing his way through the walls until the Persians had to abandon their own city. After passing through Cappadocia with scarcely any resistance thanks to incompetent local governors in 333 BCE, Darius III, the Persian Shahanshah – king of kings – could stomach this embarrassment no longer, and with an army that outnumbered the Greeks by two to one, confronted Alexander at the Battle of Issus. Were the king to fail here then Darius' army would be able to link up with his powerful navy and Alexander's whole campaign, resting as it did on his thin line of victories down the coast, would be wiped out and all dreams of Greek civilisation free from the menaces of its aggressive Eastern neighbour would spill out into the dust like so much wasted Macedonian blood. At Issus, Alexander rode up and down his ranks of assembled men to deliver an address worthy of heroes, playing on old glories and grudges.

"He excited the Illyrians and Thracians by describing the enemy's wealth and treasures, and the Greeks by putting them in mind of their wars of old, and their deadly hatred towards the Persians," wrote the historian Justin in the 3rd century CE. "He reminded the Macedonians at one time of their conquests in Europe, and at another of their desire to subdue Asia, boasting that no troops in the world had been found a match for them, and assuring them that this battle would put an end to their labours and crown their glory."

With shock etched upon his face, Darius fled the battlefield as the Greek charge cut through his ranks like a scythe, with Alexander at its head, crashing straight through the Persian flanks and then into their rearguard. With their king gone they began a chaotic and humiliating retreat. With only one Persian port left – Tyre, in what is now Lebanon – and the hill fort of Gaza in modern Palestine both falling in 332 BCE, the thinly stretched Achaemenid defences west of Babylon quickly crumbled or withdrew before the relentless march of Alexander.

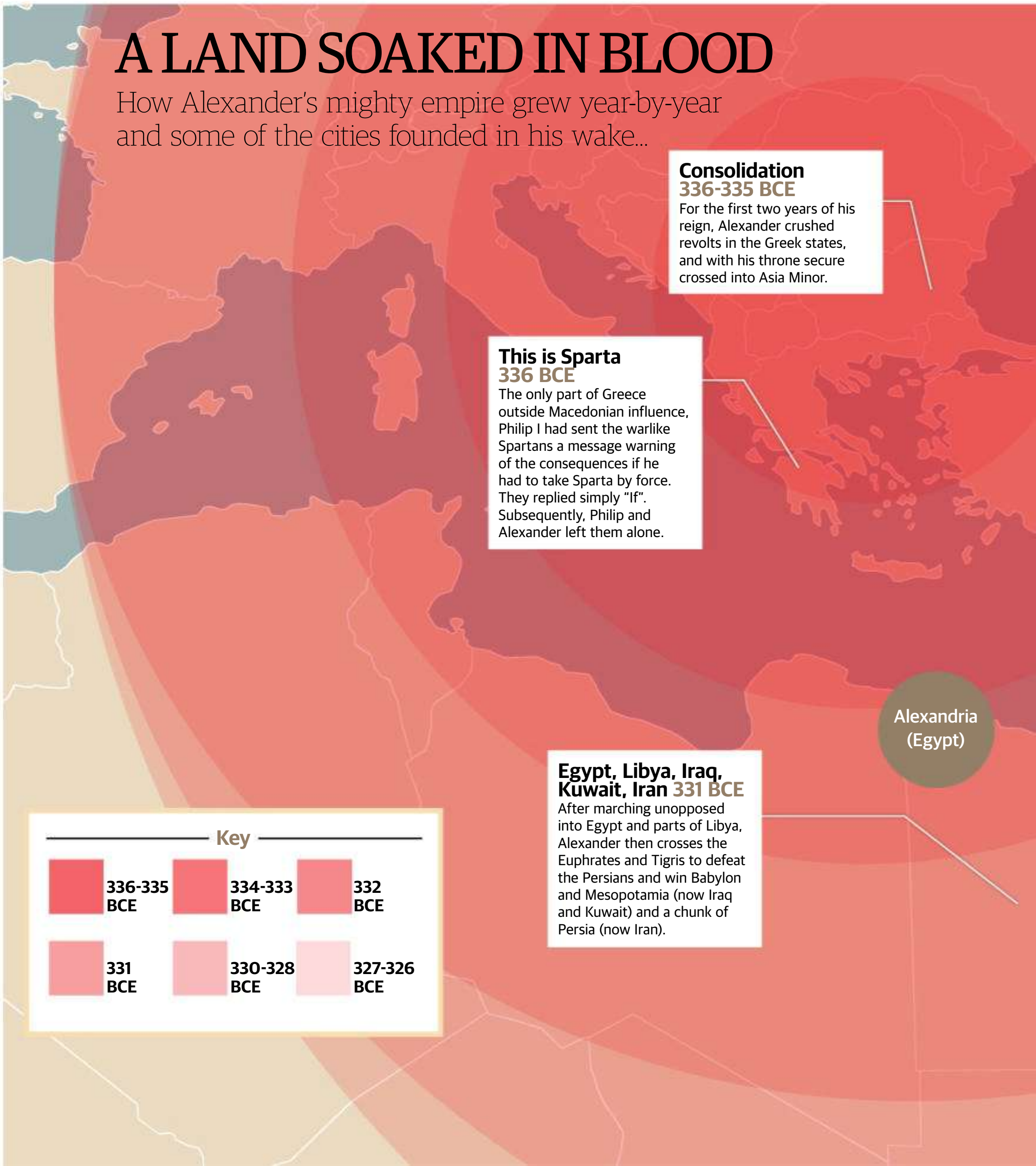
Unexpectedly, he then turned his attention not east toward the enemy's exposed heart, but west in the direction of Egypt and Libya. They, like the Greek colonies of Asia Minor, would welcome him as a saviour. With no standing army and whole swathes of the country in the hands of Egyptian rebels, the Persian governor handed over control of the province outright. The last set of invaders had disrespected their gods, so perhaps the Egyptians were keen to take advantage of Alexander's vanity and safeguard their faith by placing this new warlord right at the heart of it. Maybe, too, Alexander had seen how illusionary Persian authority was in Egypt, and wanted to try a different tack. He may have been one of the world's greatest generals, but he knew the sword was not the only path to acquiring new territory.

Riding out to the famous Oracle of Amun – the Egyptian answer to Zeus – at the Siwa oasis, Alexander was welcomed into the inner sanctum of this ancient temple, an honour usually afforded only to the ordained priests of Amun, while his entourage was forced to wait in the courtyard. The exact details of Alexander's exchange with the Oracle remain a mystery, but the end result was unambiguous. Alexander was now more than merely a hero of legend. Even the myth of Achilles reborn could scarcely contain his ambition, and he declared himself the son of Zeus. His worship spread across Egypt, where he was raised to the rank of Pharaoh. This didn't sit well with Alexander's countrymen, but here at least, the king didn't push it.

"[Alexander] bore himself haughtily towards the barbarians," recalled the army's official historian Plutarch, "and like one fully persuaded of his divine birth and parentage, but with the Greeks it was within limits and somewhat rarely that he assumed his own divinity." Despite his 'haughtiness', Alexander had been raised on tales of the Egyptian gods from his mother, and Greeks – Plato among them – had long journeyed to this ancient land to study in what they regarded as the birthplace of civilisation. Standing amid the great pyramids, the 25-year-old Alexander either saw around him an ancient power to be held in great respect or feats of long-dead god-kings that he had to better.

The result was the city of Alexandria, planned in detail by the king, from wide boulevards and great temples to defences and plumbing. Construction began in 331 BCE, and it remains the second-largest city and largest seaport in Egypt, linking the king's new world to his old one, both by trade across the Mediterranean and by culture. In making Alexandria the crossroads between two great civilisations, a great centre of learning where Greek and Egyptian religion, medicine, art, mathematics

> "The power-drunk Alexander burnt the palace to the ground in, it is believed, retaliation for the sack of Athens"



A LAND SOAKED IN BLOOD

How Alexander's mighty empire grew year-by-year and some of the cities founded in his wake...

Consolidation
336-335 BCE
For the first two years of his reign, Alexander crushed revolts in the Greek states, and with his throne secure crossed into Asia Minor.

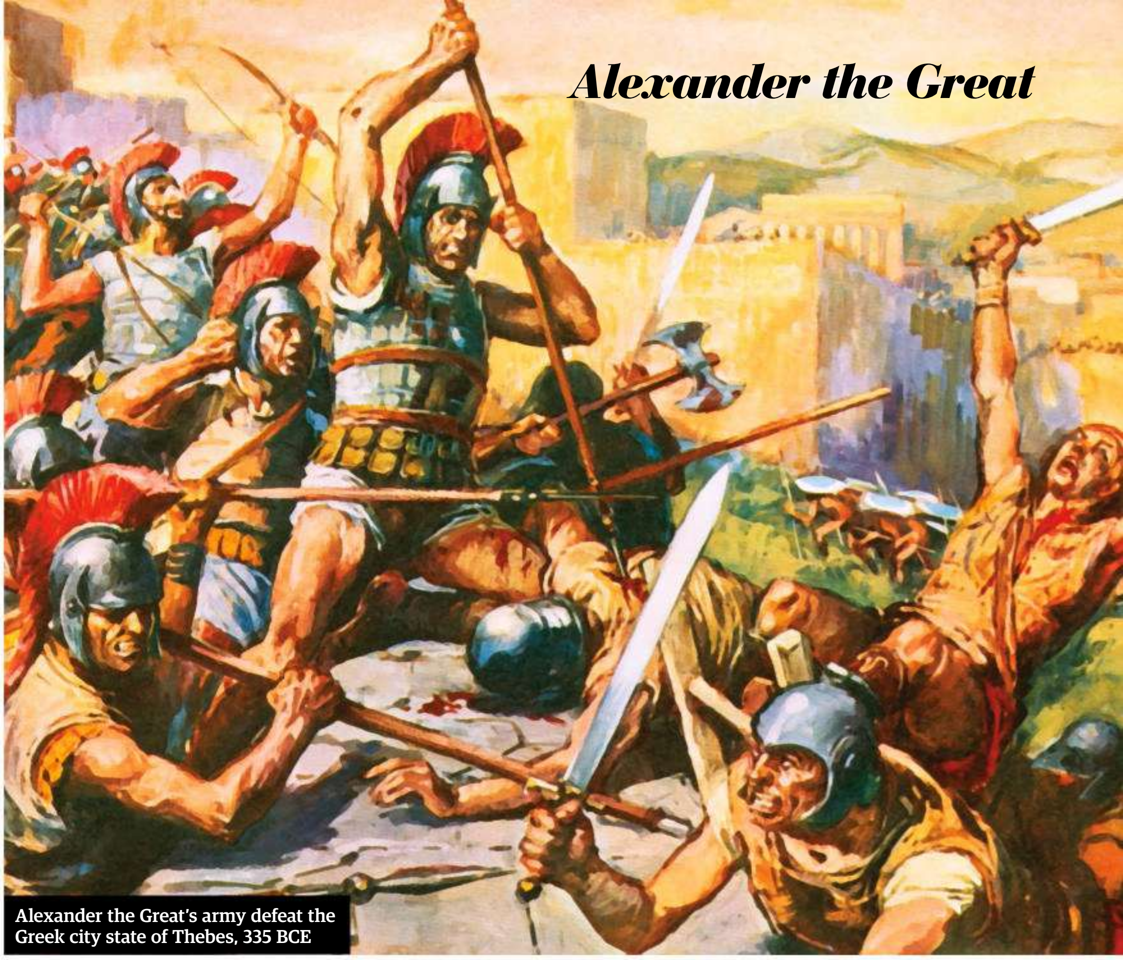
This is Sparta
336 BCE
The only part of Greece outside Macedonian influence, Philip I had sent the warlike Spartans a message warning of the consequences if he had to take Sparta by force. They replied simply "If". Subsequently, Philip and Alexander left them alone.

Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran **331 BCE**
After marching unopposed into Egypt and parts of Libya, Alexander then crosses the Euphrates and Tigris to defeat the Persians and win Babylon and Mesopotamia (now Iraq and Kuwait) and a chunk of Persia (now Iran).

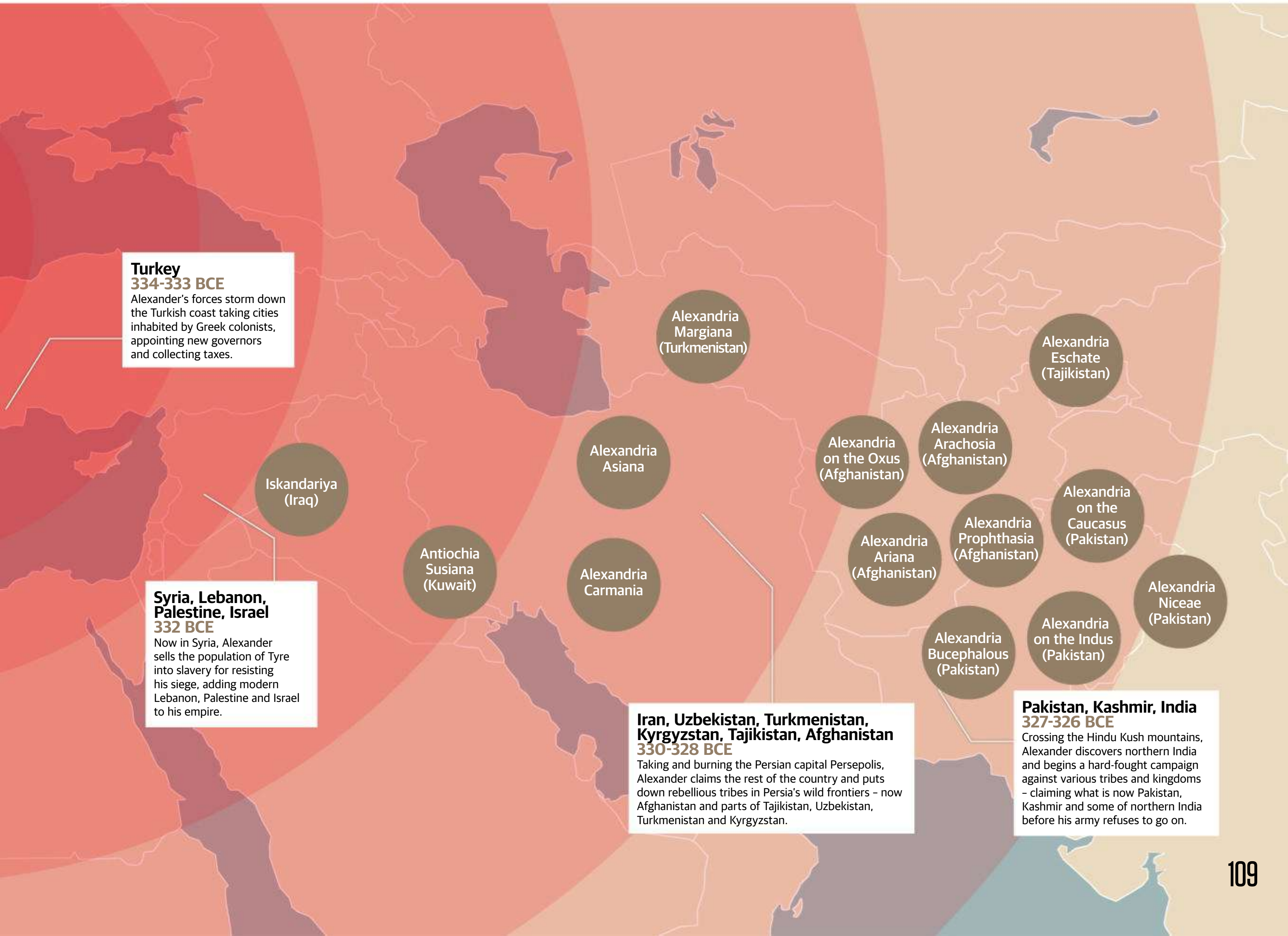
and philosophy could be bound together was created, and the city came to symbolise the better aspects of Alexander's nature, his desire for education and learning and his patronage. Darker days, though, lay ahead.

Like an angel of death, Alexander turned from his 'liberation' of the Achaemenid Empire's downtrodden subjects and drove east with a vengeance. Now in the belly of the beast, Alexander's less heroic qualities were beginning to show themselves with greater regularity - an arrogance, cruelty and obsessive drive that had he failed in his conquest, would have been remembered as the madness of a tyrant rather than the drive of a king.

Breaking out of a pincer movement to defeat Darius again at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE, Alexander seized Babylonia. Provincial rulers loyal to the humiliated king of kings promptly surrendered. With his authority crumbling, Darius was stabbed by one of his generals, Bessus, and left by the roadside, where pursuing Greek scouts found him in 330 BCE. Overcome with pity - and perhaps respect for this foe they had chased across mountains and deserts - they offered the



Alexander the Great's army defeat the Greek city state of Thebes, 335 BCE


Alexandria Margiana (Turkmenistan)
Alexandria Eschate (Tajikistan)
Alexandria Asiana
Alexandria on the Oxus (Afghanistan)
Alexandria Arachosia (Afghanistan)
Iskandariya (Iraq)
Alexandria on the Caucasus (Pakistan)
Antiochia Susiana (Kuwait)
Alexandria Carmania
Alexandria Ariana (Afghanistan)
Alexandria Prophthasia (Afghanistan)
Alexandria Niceae (Pakistan)
Alexandria Bucephalous (Pakistan)
Alexandria on the Indus (Pakistan)

Turkey
334-333 BCE
Alexander's forces storm down the Turkish coast taking cities inhabited by Greek colonists, appointing new governors and collecting taxes.

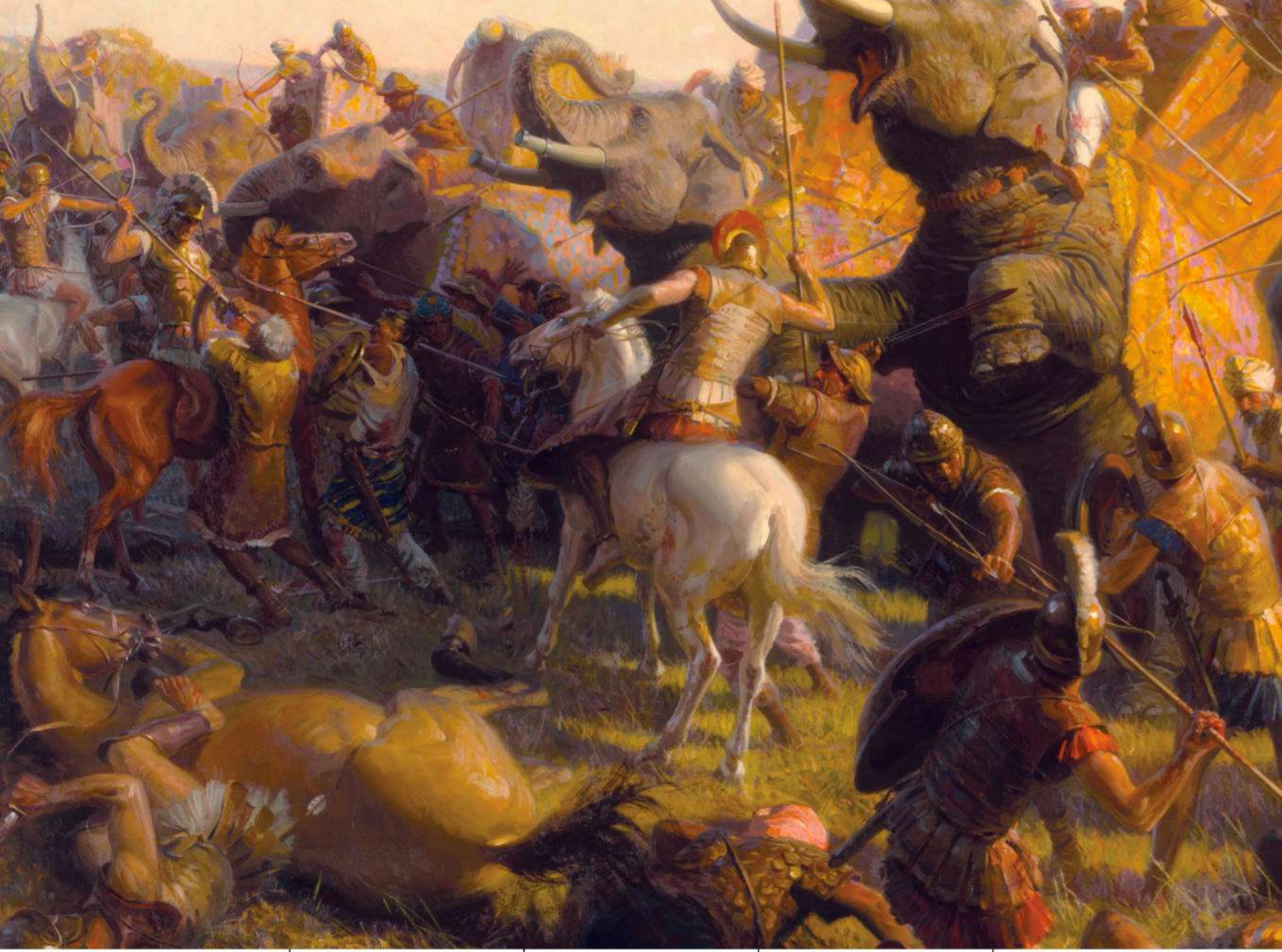
Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel
332 BCE
Now in Syria, Alexander sells the population of Tyre into slavery for resisting his siege, adding modern Lebanon, Palestine and Israel to his empire.

Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan
330-328 BCE
Taking and burning the Persian capital Persepolis, Alexander claims the rest of the country and puts down rebellious tribes in Persia's wild frontiers - now Afghanistan and parts of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Pakistan, Kashmir, India
327-326 BCE
Crossing the Hindu Kush mountains, Alexander discovers northern India and begins a hard-fought campaign against various tribes and kingdoms - claiming what is now Pakistan, Kashmir and some of northern India before his army refuses to go on.

Alexander's army

How the Ancient Greeks fought and conquered



1. Companion Cavalry

Strengths
Well trained, wedge formation made turning easier, heavy bronze armour.

Weaknesses
Vulnerable to tightly packed infantry.

How did Alexander deploy them?
The Companion Cavalry were the unstoppable knights of Macedonia. Usually stationed on the right flank, they would punch through the enemy lines with their xyston lances and then wheel round to charge the rear.

2. Thessalian Cavalry

Strengths
Well trained, diamond formation for manoeuvrability, variety of weapons.

Weaknesses
Lighter armour than most heavy cavalry.

How did Alexander deploy them?
The Thessalian Cavalry's lighter armour and shorter spears and javelins made them an effective defensive unit. Stationed on the left flank, they could go where they were needed to see off any attackers.

3. Hoplites

Hoplites were the basic foot soldier of the Greek states.

Strengths
Versatile and adaptable.

Weaknesses
Low training, light armour.

How did Alexander deploy them?
Hoplites were the citizen men-at-arms of the other Greek states and one of the army's main cornerstones. Versatile but not necessarily as well-trained or heavily armoured as other units, Hoplites were placed behind the phalanx to prevent the army being encircled.

4. Phalanx

Strengths
The phalanx formation is devastating against cavalry, well trained and fast moving.

Weaknesses
Vulnerable in the flanks and rear, lightly equipped.

How did Alexander deploy them?
Created by Alexander's father the well-drilled and fast-moving pikemen fought in the dreaded Macedonian phalanx with their five-metre sarissa lance. Deployed in the centre of the battle line, the phalanx could rush forward to tie down enemy cavalry or infantry.

5. Hypaspists

The Hypaspists were Alexander's close-quarter shock troops.

Strengths
Versatile close combat specialists, well-trained veterans.

Weaknesses
Vulnerable to cavalry and massed infantry.

How did Alexander deploy them?
Macedonia's elite commandos, the Hypaspists carried large round shields, thrusting spears and swords, and were placed on the flank of the Foot Companions for their protection. Devastating in closed spaces.

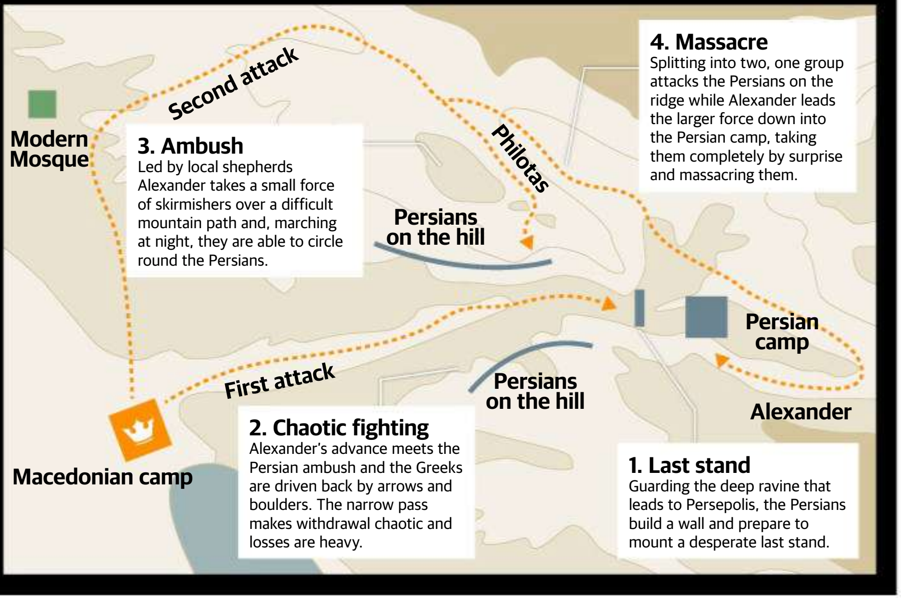
A painting showing Alexander the Great and his forces battling an Indian army

BATTLE OF THE PERSIAN GATE (331 BCE)

Alexander turns defeat into victory to take the Persian capital

Failure could have left Alexander's Persia divided between the Macedonian king and usurper Bessus, vulnerable to revolt and invasion from central Asia.

Despite a rare crushing defeat in the bloody bottleneck of the Persian ambush, Alexander was able to make use of local knowledge, as well as his hardy skirmishers and turn the wild terrain in his favour, ambushing the Persians in turn and decimating them with his two forces. Historians have called this victory 'complete' and 'decisive' and it left him able to take the ancient capital of Persepolis unopposed and claim its massive wealth for himself. On leaving the city he burnt it to the ground.



4. Massacre
Splitting into two, one group attacks the Persians on the ridge while Alexander leads the larger force down into the Persian camp, taking them completely by surprise and massacring them.

3. Ambush
Led by local shepherds Alexander takes a small force of skirmishers over a difficult mountain path and, marching at night, they are able to circle round the Persians.

2. Chaotic fighting
Alexander's advance meets the Persian ambush and the Greeks are driven back by arrows and boulders. The narrow pass makes withdrawal chaotic and losses are heavy.

1. Last stand
Guarding the deep ravine that leads to Persepolis, the Persians build a wall and prepare to mount a desperate last stand.

6. Light cavalry

Strengths
Easily replaced, some horse archers.

Weaknesses
Variable equipment and training, light armour of leather or linen.

How did Alexander deploy them?
A combination of lighter armed and armoured cavalry from the other Greek states and local horsemen conscripted in Asia. Deployed dependent on weapons and training, Alexander came to rely on them as the traditional Greek heavy cavalry dwindled.

dying king of kings water from a nearby spring. In declaring himself Shahanshah, Bessus's throne was a fiction, and only a handful of frontier provinces remained in the usurper's blood-slick hands. The once glorious Persian Empire, for 220 years the largest in the ancient world, had died by the roadside, humiliated and betrayed.

Taking the capital Persepolis after a last-ditch attempt to hold back the Greeks at a narrow pass called the Persian Gates, the power-drunk Alexander burnt the great palace to the ground in, it is believed, retaliation for the Persian sack of Athens in 480 BCE. Casting the first torch into the building himself, looting and burning spread across the city. Priests were murdered and Persian women forced to marry his soldiers. Zoroastrian prophecy had foretold "demons with dishevelled hair, of the race of wrath" and now, Persia's holy men realised, the demons were here.

As his predecessor Darius had been, Bessus was chased down by the ferocious and dogmatic Alexander into what is now Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. Across deserts with little supplies, Alexander rode along his lines, picking up men who fell and lifting their spirits. A charismatic leader even against the backdrop of the bloodiest of campaigns, he had the power to inspire his weary soldiers. Eventually, Bessus' support collapsed. With no army worth a damn, he had been forced to burn crops and stores before the Greek advance in a last-ditch attempt to slow Alexander's terrible pursuit. Fittingly for the betrayer of the last Shahanshah, his own men handed him over to the Greeks. His nose and ears were cut off at Alexander's command, and he was sent back to Persia in chains to be impaled, the Persian punishment for traitors.

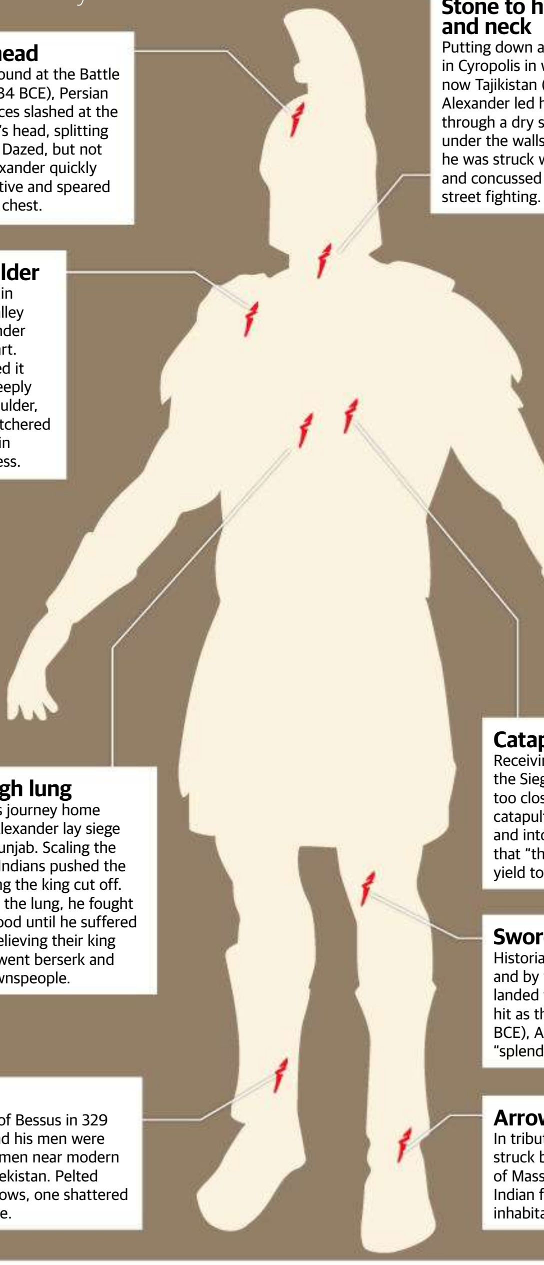
This rampage across Persia and her furthest fringes wasn't the first time Alexander's determination had taken on a more murderous hue. In 334 BCE, he had marched his men into the sea up to their chins rather than turn back along the beach, only surviving because the tide began to change direction with the wind, and in 332 BCE this sheer bloody-mindedness joined forces with his ruthlessness at Tyre – the first of many appalling massacres. Refusing to surrender and believing their island fortress was impregnable from land, Alexander laid siege, blockaded the port from the Persian navy and over seven months built a causeway from the mainland to the city – an incredible feat of engineering that allowed his catapults to come within range of the city. Tyre was soon breached, and Alexander's fury fell upon the city's population. Of the 40,000 inhabitants of Tyre, 2,000 were crucified on the beach, 4,000 were killed in the fighting, a handful were pardoned, and over 30,000 sold into slavery.

This act of impossible engineering and bloody vengeance was later repeated in northern India at the Battle of Aornos in 327 BCE, where the crossing of a mountain ravine by improvised wooden bridge – built over seven days and seven nights – was followed by the massacre of the tribal Aśvakas. Welcoming Alexander with open arms, the Greek-speaking Branchidae were set upon when it became known their ancestors had collaborated with the Achaemenids, while other defenders were murdered because they surrendered too late, or been promised safe passage to lure them from behind their walls and into the spears of the Macedonian phalanx.

Like arterial spray on armour, growing accounts of sackings, burnings, enslavement and murder pepper the record of Alexander in gore. It seemed like the further he got from home, the darker his deeds became.

ALEXANDER'S INJURIES

The warrior king spent his reign at war and certainly suffered for it...



Scimitar to head
While galloping around at the Battle of the Granicus (334 BCE), Persian nobleman Rhoesaces slashed at the back of Alexander's head, splitting his helmet in two. Dazed, but not seriously hurt, Alexander quickly regained the initiative and speared his attacker in the chest.

Stone to head and neck
Putting down a revolt in Cyropolis in what is now Tajikistan (329 BCE), Alexander led his soldiers through a dry stream and under the walls, where he was struck with a rock and concussed in the street fighting.

Dart to shoulder
While laying siege in Pakistan's Swat Valley in 327 BCE, Alexander was struck by a dart. His armour stopped it penetrating too deeply into the king's shoulder, but the Greeks butchered all their prisoners in revenge nonetheless.

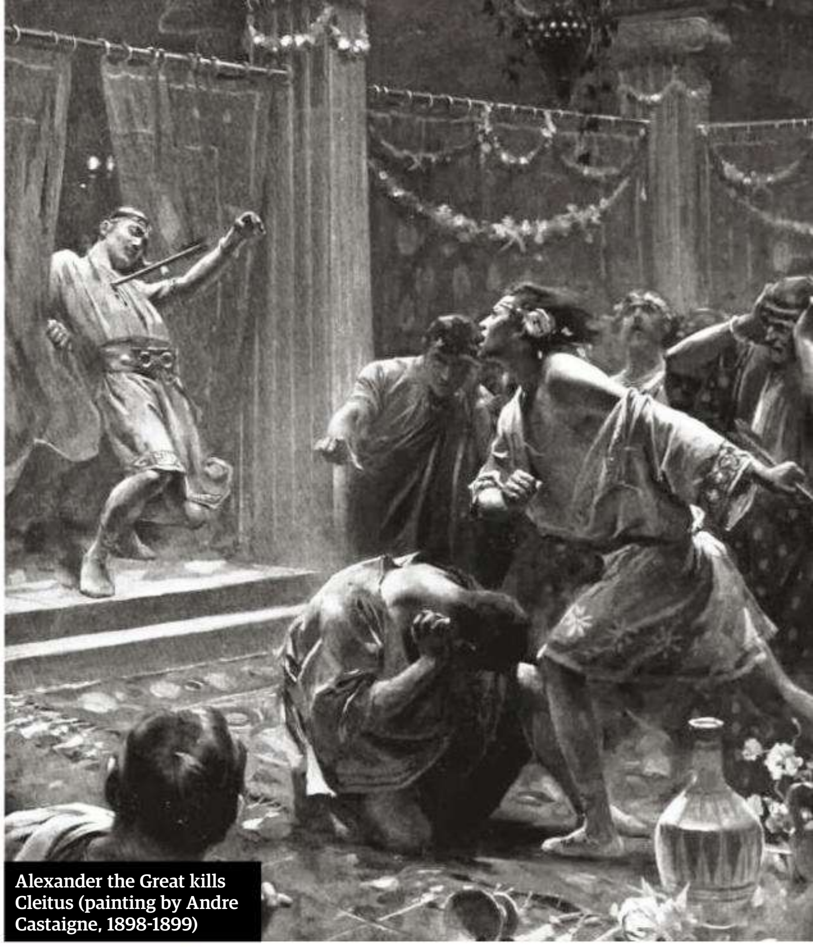
Catapult to chest
Receiving an omen that he would be wounded in the Siege of Gaza (332 BCE), Alexander ventured too close to the city walls, and a missile from a catapult split his shield, tore through his armour and into his chest. The historian Arrian recalled that "the wound was serious and did not easily yield to treatment."

Arrow through lung
During the Greek's journey home down the Indus, Alexander lay siege to a town in the Punjab. Scaling the walls himself, the Indians pushed the ladder back, leaving the king cut off. Taking an arrow in the lung, he fought on drenched in blood until he suffered a haemorrhage. Believing their king dead, the Greeks went berserk and massacred the townspeople.

Sword to thigh
Historians are unclear as to how it was inflicted and by who (one story is that Darius III himself landed the blow), but clearly an artery wasn't hit as the day after the Battle of Issus (333 BCE), Alexander visited the wounded and held a "splendid military funeral."

Arrow to leg
After the capture of Bessus in 329 BCE, Alexander and his men were attacked by tribesmen near modern Samarkand in Uzbekistan. Pelted with rocks and arrows, one shattered the king's calf bone.

Arrow to ankle
In tribute to his ancestor Achilles, Alexander was struck by an arrow to the ankle during the Siege of Massaga (327 BCE), breaking the bone. The Indian fort was then reduced to rubble and its inhabitants massacred.



Alexander the Great kills Cleitus (painting by Andre Castaigne, 1898-1899)

While the rewards of conquest - plunder, wives, riches and glory - had been great, the Greeks were beginning to tire not just of this endless war that had taken them further and further from home, but Alexander's increasing pretensions. This monarch from Greece's barbarian hinterland had begun to dress in Persian robes, train Persians for the army and insist on courtiers throwing themselves to the ground in the manner of subjects before the Persian king of kings - an affront to the dignity of the Greeks, who took pride in never bowing to their monarchs. On top of that, he now wished to be worshipped as a god.

After one drunken celebration in 328 BCE, this discontent found voice when Cleitus the Black, an old Macedonian general who had served under Philip II and saved Alexander's life in battle, decided he'd had his fill. The general bristled, turned to Alexander, and told him that he would be nothing without the accomplishments of Philip, and all that he now possessed was earned by the blood and sacrifice of Macedonians. Alexander, more petulant than entirely regal in his fury, threw an apple at the general's head, called for his guards and then for a dagger or spear, but wary of escalation, those present quickly began bustling Cleitus from the room and tried to calm their monarch. Either Cleitus wasn't fully removed or then returned, but having clearly passed the point of no return, continued to vent his spleen, until Alexander, finally grabbing hold of a javelin, threw it clean through the old warhorse's heart.

Cleitus was one of the first to challenge the king, but he wasn't the last. In 327 BCE, a plot against him was betrayed, and the conspirators - his own royal pages - stoned to death. Then, later that year he struck another body blow against his traditional supporters. Callisthenes, grand-nephew of Alexander's tutor Aristotle and one of the many historians in Alexander's retinue, had become increasingly critical of his delusions of grandeur, and taunted him with a line from his beloved *Iliad*: "A better man than you by far was Patroclus, and still death did not escape him." In short - you're no god, and you'll die just like the rest of us. Alexander accused Callisthenes of collusion in the pages' conspiracy, and had him put to death.

It was the beginning of the end. Convinced he was a god, it would be the needs of men that would bring the conquests of Alexander to heel. Adamant that they were at the edge of the world and expecting to see the great sea that the Ancient Greeks believed ringed their continent from which they could return home, Alexander pushed his increasingly mutinous army into India. Confronted with valley after valley of new lands to conquer and battles to wage, they drove on - winning a costly victory against 200 war elephants fielded by King Porus on the banks of the Indus River. Battered and broken after 22,000 kilometres and eight years, monsoon season arrived and drenched the army in water and disease. Rumours also reached the camp that India was bigger than they had previously heard, and contained armies even greater than that of Porus.

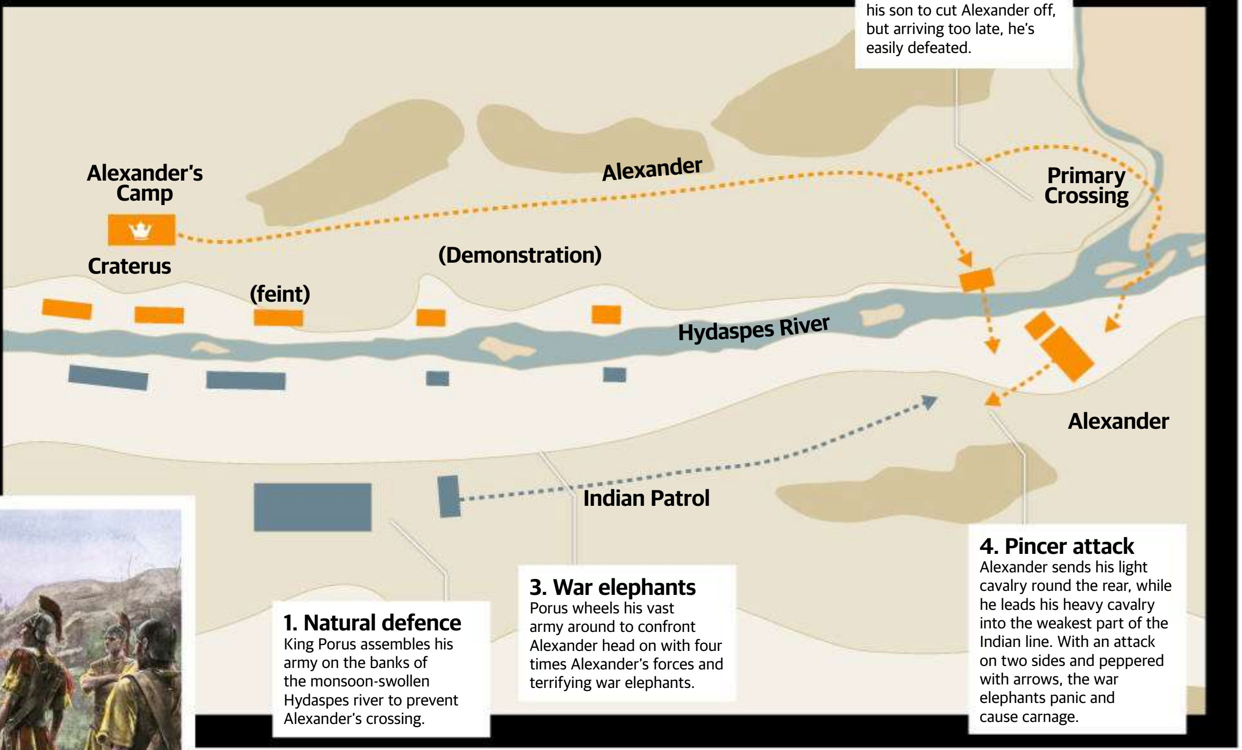
Alexander's generals, mindful of the fate that had befallen other critics of their king, approached cautiously and appealed to his nobility. Coenus - one of Alexander's most trusted commanders

BATTLE OF THE HYDASPES (326 BCE)

Alexander's battle for the Punjab opens up India to the Greeks

Despite leaving him with 1,000 Greek dead, Alexander was eventually able to overcome the numerically superior force and deadly war elephants of King Porus. He managed to do this by using a classic pincer movement and refusal to bow down to nature – in this case, the fast-moving waters of the Hydaspes River.

Porus' defeat left the Punjab region of northern India open to the Greek invaders, but the death toll would add to rumblings of mutiny in Alexander's ranks.

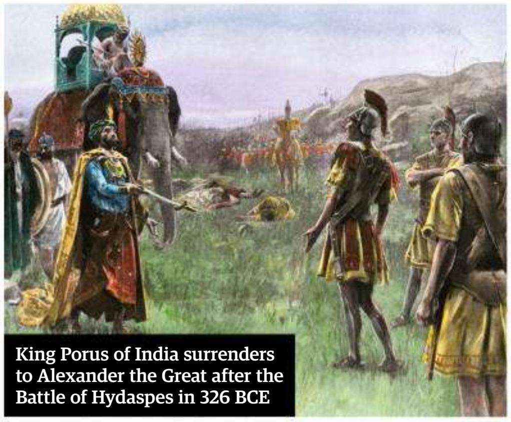


2. Secret crossing
Alexander secretly leads a small detachment up river to cross via a small island. Porus sends a force led by his son to cut Alexander off, but arriving too late, he's easily defeated.

1. Natural defence
King Porus assembles his army on the banks of the monsoon-swollen Hydaspes river to prevent Alexander's crossing.

3. War elephants
Porus wheels his vast army around to confront Alexander head on with four times Alexander's forces and terrifying war elephants.

4. Pincer attack
Alexander sends his light cavalry round the rear, while he leads his heavy cavalry into the weakest part of the Indian line. With an attack on two sides and peppered with arrows, the war elephants panic and cause carnage.



King Porus of India surrenders to Alexander the Great after the Battle of Hydaspes in 326 BCE

> "Even with his dreams of ceaseless conquest doused like campfires before battle, Alexander fought fiercely"

– implored him to let them return home to their families, saying so eloquently, "We have achieved so many marvellous successes, but isn't it time to set some limit? Surely you can see yourself how few are left of the original army that began this enterprise… Sire," he concluded, "the sign of a great man is knowing when to stop."

Reluctantly, the warrior king agreed. Building a temple to Dionysus on the riverbank and leaving the inscription 'Alexander stopped here', they built a fleet of flat-bottom ships and began a long voyage home. Alexander the Great's conquest began with Homer's *Iliad* as its guide – a tale of triumph and conquest – and ended with the *Odyssey* – a desperate voyage home.

There were more battles, tragedies and triumphs to come, and many would never see home thanks to the long-running battles with the Indian kingdoms they passed through on their way down the Indus River toward the Arabian Sea, from where they could sail to Persia's southern coast. One battle in early 325 BCE against the Malhi people of Punjab nearly cost Alexander his life as a siege ladder collapsed behind him, leaving him stranded on enemy ramparts. Even with his dreams of ceaseless conquest doused like campfires before battle, Alexander fought fiercely until an arrow pierced his lung, his chroniclers describing air escaping with the blood. Even with all Alexander had subjected them to, his army remained devoted to their monarch – believing him dead, they rampaged through the city, looting, killing and burning in retaliation. Patched up by his doctor, gaunt and unsteady, Alexander had to be sailed past his army while lined up on the riverbank before they would accept he was still alive.

With one force exploring the Persian Gulf, Alexander led the remnants of his army through what is now the Balochistan province of Iran – a sparsely populated landscape of arid mountains and desert. His men died in their hundreds, gasping for water, stumbling through the baking sands in their tattered sandals and blinking into the brilliant sun. By 324 BCE they had reached the Persian city of Susa, but back in the heart of the empire he had stolen, his trials continued – his childhood friend, stalwart general and, some historians have implied, lover Hephaestion died, and then in August the Macedonians in his army mutinied. The Macedonians he placated, but the grief he felt at the loss of "the friend I value with my own life" could not be so easily put right.

While his father died with dreams of a Persian conquest upon his lips, Alexander succumbed to a fever in 323 BCE with greater dreams still. Before his eyes poured the spears of the phalanx south into Arabia and west into Carthage and Rome. "Who shall lead us?" his followers whispered to their dying king. "The strongest," he replied, and with his passing the great empire splintered.

In his tactical genius, charismatic leadership, enduring legacy and fanatical drive, Alexander was far removed from those around him. Perhaps in his view, 'elevated' above those around him, he was so far removed as to be incomparable. He was never defeated in battle, partly because of his tactical skill, leadership and army, but also because he was prepared to pay a toll in human lives.

Tales of the Greek gods endure not just because they present an ideal of heroism and greatness, but because they were flawed beings. Like the squabbling deities of Mount Olympus, Alexander the Great was violent, vain, petty and cynical, and like them he overcame impossible odds and accomplished breathtaking feats through ingenuity, charisma, martial prowess and force of will. His example were venerated by emperors, tactics studied by leaders for over 2,000 years, and in the Middle East, tales of 'Alexander the Cursed's' savagery are still told. For good and ill, the shadow he casts is still the stuff of legend.

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Ancient Greece in eclipse

Numerous factors conspired to bring the glory of Greece to subjugation by the Roman Empire during the 2nd century BCE

By 323 BCE, Alexander the Great, son of the iconic King Philip II of Macedonia, had conquered most of the known world. Aged only in his early 30s, Alexander had led armies to victory from the Eastern Mediterranean to the valley of the Indus River - and he was now on his deathbed.

Both Alexander's exact age and his cause of death are unknown, however, scholars speculate that wounds received in a battle in India had become infected, spreading toxin throughout his body. Regardless of the cause, Alexander was to become as influential in death as he had been in life. With its leader gone, the vast empire won through conquest might well descend into chaos, and slip into history almost as swiftly as it had been won.

As Alexander's life ebbed, his generals gathered around, bent close, and asked which of them should inherit the mantle of power. Alexander is believed to have whispered: "The fittest" or "the strongest."

The death of Alexander is a watershed in the history of the Western world, not simply because of his prowess as a military commander and conqueror, his youth, or the aura of invincibility that surrounds the mere utterance of his name to this day, but also because it ushered in generations of conflict and rivalry among his lieutenants that hastened the demise of Classical Greece. The rise of Hellenistic Greece that followed in Alexander's turbulent wake is only part of the story of that demise.

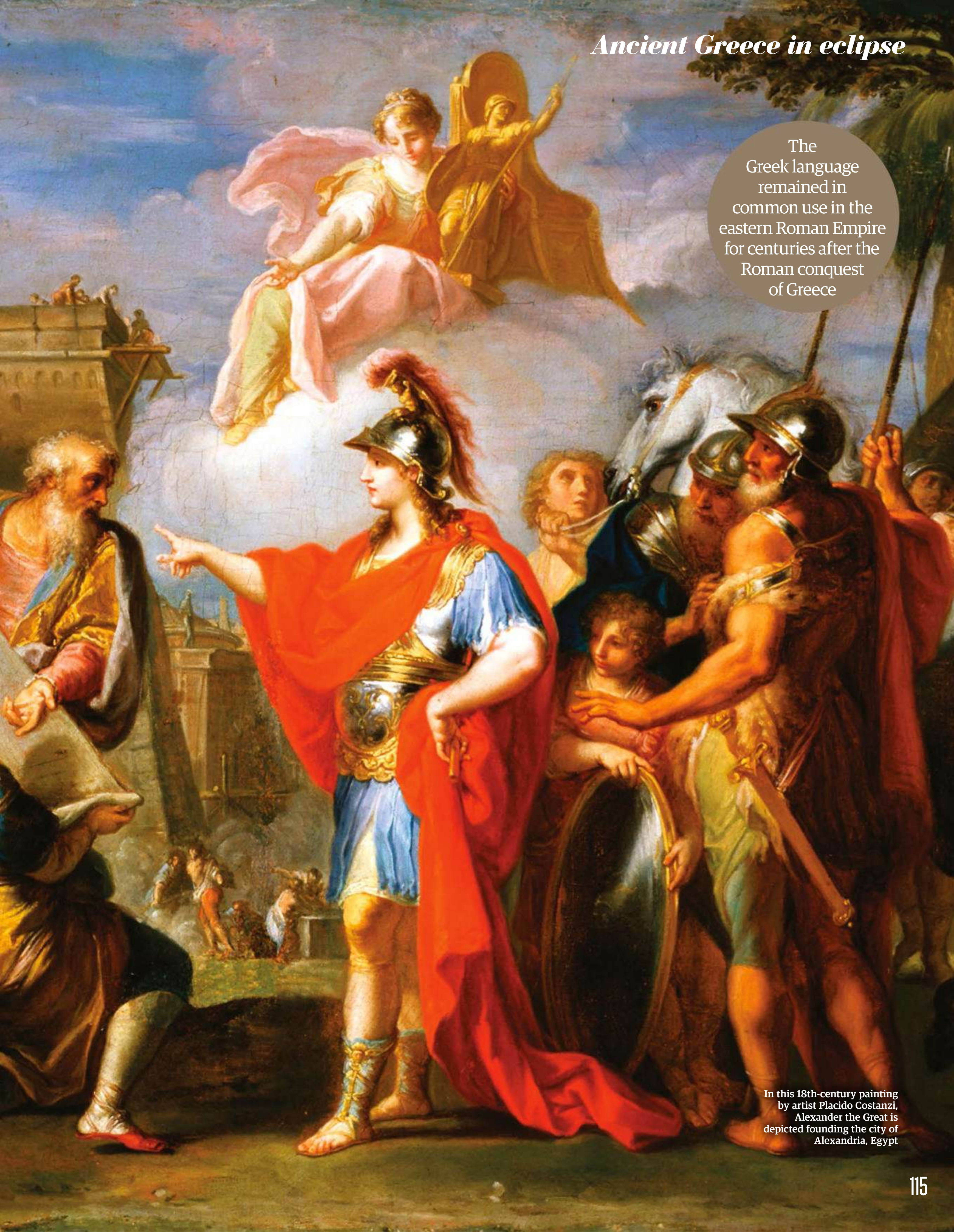
The Library of Alexandria, a trove of manuscripts, was constructed in the 3rd century BCE, but later destroyed by fire

SEEDS OF DISCORD

Long before the ascendance of Alexander, the city-states of Greece were building, stone by stone, the road to ruinous discord and their own subjugation. As with great civilisations before and since, Classical Greece was as much a victim of its own evolution, infighting, ambitions and prosperity as any external forces that came to bear. Through the centuries, numerous circumstances arose, matured and metastasized, eventually resulting in the absorption of Greek territory by the Roman Empire.

Although they shared a common language, banded together to defeat the invading Persians in the early 5th century, and worshipped the same pantheon of gods, the city-states of Greece were for the most part politically, militarily and economically independent of one another. This condition was fostered in part due to geography. Mountains divided lands, and those who settled along the Aegean Sea were drawn to a maritime existence.

While the flowering of culture, particularly in Athens, was tremendous, militarism became



The Greek language remained in common use in the eastern Roman Empire for centuries after the Roman conquest of Greece

In this 18th-century painting by artist Placido Costanzi, Alexander the Great is depicted founding the city of Alexandria, Egypt

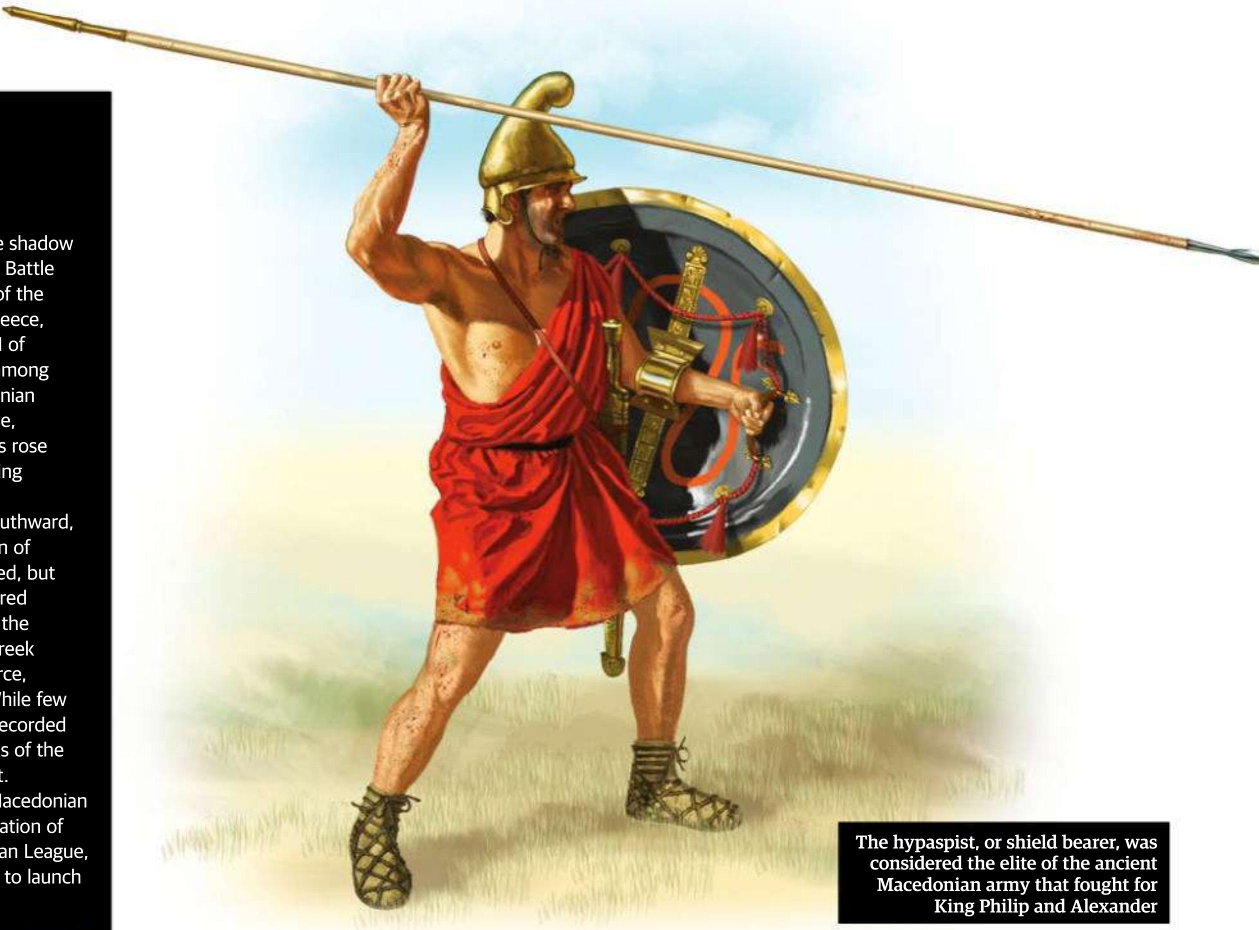
Battle of Chaeronea

Although it has languished historically in the shadow of Thermopylae, Marathon and Salamis, the Battle of Chaeronea, fought in 338 BCE, was one of the most significant in the history of Ancient Greece, and indeed the Western world. King Philip II of Macedonia had fostered a tentative peace among the city-states, but also proclaimed Macedonian hegemony over much of Greece. In response, Athens, Thebes and several other city-states rose against the Macedonians, intent on preserving their independence.

Philip led his strong Macedonian army southward, intent on crushing the threat to his assertion of power. A stalemate of several months ensued, but Philip then marched into Boeotia and prepared to advance on both Athens and Thebes. As the Macedonians proceeded, the army of the Greek alliance, roughly the same size as Philip's force, assembled to fight and blocked the road. While few details of the actual battle are known, it is recorded that Philip succeeded in crushing both flanks of the opposing army, putting his enemies to flight.

With Athens and Thebes defeated, the Macedonian victory at Chaeronea assured Philip's domination of Greece, led to the formation of the Corinthian League, and ultimately enabled Alexander the Great to launch his epic conquests.

This funerary relief sculpture honoured Pancahres, an Athenian soldier who is thought to have died during the Battle of Chaeronea



The hypaspist, or shield bearer, was considered the elite of the ancient Macedonian army that fought for King Philip and Alexander

This bust of Ptolemy I Soter depicts the former lieutenant of Alexander the Great as a pharaoh of Egypt

a way of life in Sparta, and other city-states such as Thebes and Corinth sought their due. Culture, power, trade and independent thought brought about jealousies, rivalries and distrust. Through centuries of colonisation, Greek culture had spread across the Mediterranean and into Asia Minor, however, while the people of these colonies embraced the culture, they were not always loyal to their parent city-state. Often, they began to consider themselves independent, protective of their own interests and identities. Therefore, what little sense of Greek commonality or community may have existed at one time eroded in due course.

HAVES AND HAVE NOTS

As the Greek city-states accumulated tremendous wealth through trade, tribute payments from vassals, and the exploitation of resources, inevitably a stratification of social classes emerged. The poor and common citizens grew disgruntled with the growing prosperity of an elite, aristocratic class. In some city-states, this displeasure sometimes erupted in civil strife.

At the same time, the city-states were continually at war with one another or with external powers, such as Persia, bent on territorial gains or the extension of influence. The continual waging of war proved to be an expensive undertaking, which drained the treasure, manpower and eventually the tremendous prosperity of the city-states.

Intrigue, negotiation and self-interest led to ever-shifting alliances. By 431 BCE, the cataclysmic Peloponnesian War had begun. 27 years of fighting, Greek versus Greek, outside interference, starvation and death left Sparta preeminent among the city-states, its arch rival Athens reduced to a second-rate power after expending its great wealth in the long and destructive conflict.

Although militarily victorious, Sparta was also seriously weakened by the Peloponnesian War. Consequently, the Spartans were never really able to consolidate their long-sought hegemony. Sparta's principal allies, Corinth and Thebes, were weakened as well.

Of Macedonian lineage, legendary Queen of Egypt Cleopatra bore the children of both Mark Antony and Julius Caesar

The real victor of the Peloponnesian War was Persia, which had provided military support to Sparta and its Peloponnesian League, enabling the Spartans to construct a navy that could defeat the Athenians – perennially the strongest naval power in the Eastern Mediterranean – at the decisive Battle of Aegospotami in 405 BCE. Persia regained control of territories in Ionia, and benefitted from the deterioration of Greek military and economic power during the late 5th century BCE.

From the beginning, it was apparent that Sparta was capable of exerting little actual control over the other city-states, and in due course a

“Amid the feast and merrymaking, an assassin drew his bow and killed Philip with an arrow through the eye”

challenge developed as Thebes, Corinth, Argos and a resurgent Athens sought greater autonomy. The so-called Corinthian War erupted in 395 BCE, and wore on for eight years. Only the threat of renewed Persian intervention on the side of the Spartans could quell the conflict and return the relations between the city-states to their prewar status quo.

Sixteen years later, Sparta was again confronted with rebellion, principally by its former ally, Thebes. Epaminondas, a highly capable commander, led the Theban army to victory against the Spartans at Leuctra in 371 BCE, and marched into the Peloponnesian peninsula. Other city-states fell away from Sparta, joining the insurrection as Epaminondas reached the Aegean Sea.

Sparta rapidly declined, as its once-mighty army could no longer be sustained to the extent required of a first-rate power. Thebes gained preeminence, but its days at the pinnacle of the Greek world were numbered. In 362 BCE, Greek fratricide erupted once again, as Thebes and its allies fought Sparta, Athens and a collection of the other city-states known as the Mantinea League. The Battle of Mantinea ended in a tactical Theban victory, but Epaminondas and a number of his senior lieutenants were killed, while the Spartans and Athenians also suffered serious losses.

The Battle of Mantinea resulted in a strategic defeat for both sides, while a tremendous storm was brewing in the north.

OPPORTUNISM AND EXPANSION

Macedonia, a mountainous region north of the Peloponnese, had long felt the influence of Greek culture. However, the loyalties of its people were divided among clans and chieftains, none of whom had shown the leadership or real inclination to build a unified state, fully taking advantage of tremendous natural resources, and possibly even becoming a rival of Athens and Sparta.

When Philip II gained the throne of Macedonia in 359 BCE, the fortunes of the once-backward kingdom began to change. As a young man, Philip had observed the fighting techniques and operations of the Theban army. He subsequently used his military and diplomatic skills to gradually assert greater control over the warlords and minor nobility of Macedonia’s mountainous interior. In time, Philip forged an army of up to 40,000 infantry and cavalry, a loyal, well-disciplined force.

A coin bears the likeness of Seleucus I Nicator, founder of the Seleucid Empire and former lieutenant of Alexander the Great

Nearly 20 years after his rise to power in Macedonia, Philip and his powerful army struck southward in a campaign of conquest. In 338 BCE, the Macedonians defeated the armies of the Greek Confederation, principally Athens, Thebes and Corinth, at the Battle of Chaeronea. The victory brought Macedonian hegemony over the principal city-states, with the exception of a defiant Sparta.

Philip compelled most of the city-states to join the Corinthian League, which he intended not only to be a deterrent to future Persian aggression, but also as a punitive tool. Rather than fighting one another, the city-states of the Corinthian League would focus on the perennial Persian threat, and in 336 BCE, Philip announced an expedition against Persia in retribution for all the interference, pain and suffering the enemy empire had inflicted on the Greeks for so many years.

Just prior to the anticipated march against Persia, one of Philip’s daughters was married. Amid the feast and merrymaking that followed, Philip was stabbed to death by one of his own bodyguards. The king’s 20-year-old son, Alexander, ascended the throne of Macedonia, and for a while the rival commanders in Philip’s army hoped that they could control the young monarch. They were shocked, however, at the boy king’s command presence and his determination not only to continue Philip’s direct military opposition to Persia but also to extend Greek dominion to its absolute limit.

Alexander’s ambitions proved many times greater than those of his father. For 11 years, from 334 to 323 BCE, his army of Macedonians and men of other Greek lands conquered the Persian Empire, advanced eastward to India and southward to Egypt, and expanded Alexander’s dominion throughout much of the known world. Meanwhile, Sparta was finally compelled to join the Corinthian

These extensive ruins, including a once-crowded street, attest to the level of civilisation achieved in ancient Corinth

League after a Macedonian army, led by Antipater, defeated Spartan forces under King Agis III at the Battle of Megalopolis in 331 BCE.

Alexander's untimely death left a power vacuum that resulted in years of conflict, and eventually paved the way for the Roman conquest of Greece. By the late 3rd century BCE, intrigue and posturing had petered out. Alexander's rival lieutenants had come to realise virtually to a man that no individual could control all of the vast empire which Alexander had won at the point of the sword. By 281 BCE, the result was the fragmentation of Alexander's domain into four large territories.

SUCCESSOR STATES

One of Alexander's generals, Seleucus I Nicator, who campaigned with the great conqueror all the way to India, established a territory in 303 BCE known as Seleucid Greece with its capital at Antioch, in present-day Turkey. The realm consisted primarily of Syrian territory, and also included Mesopotamia. The Seleucids colonised other areas of the Mediterranean, and their cities were noted for artisans who produced commodities including tapestries, cloth dyed a rich purple hue, perfumes and quality pottery.

The Seleucids were largely responsible for exporting the Greek culture across the Mediterranean to areas that were not traditionally Greek. They founded numerous settlements and came to be known as a highly diverse citizenry, including Jewish, Phoenician, Persian and other ethnicities. That diversity, along with disputes among competing dynastic rulers, is partially to blame for the unrest that ebbed and flowed across the region for more than a century.

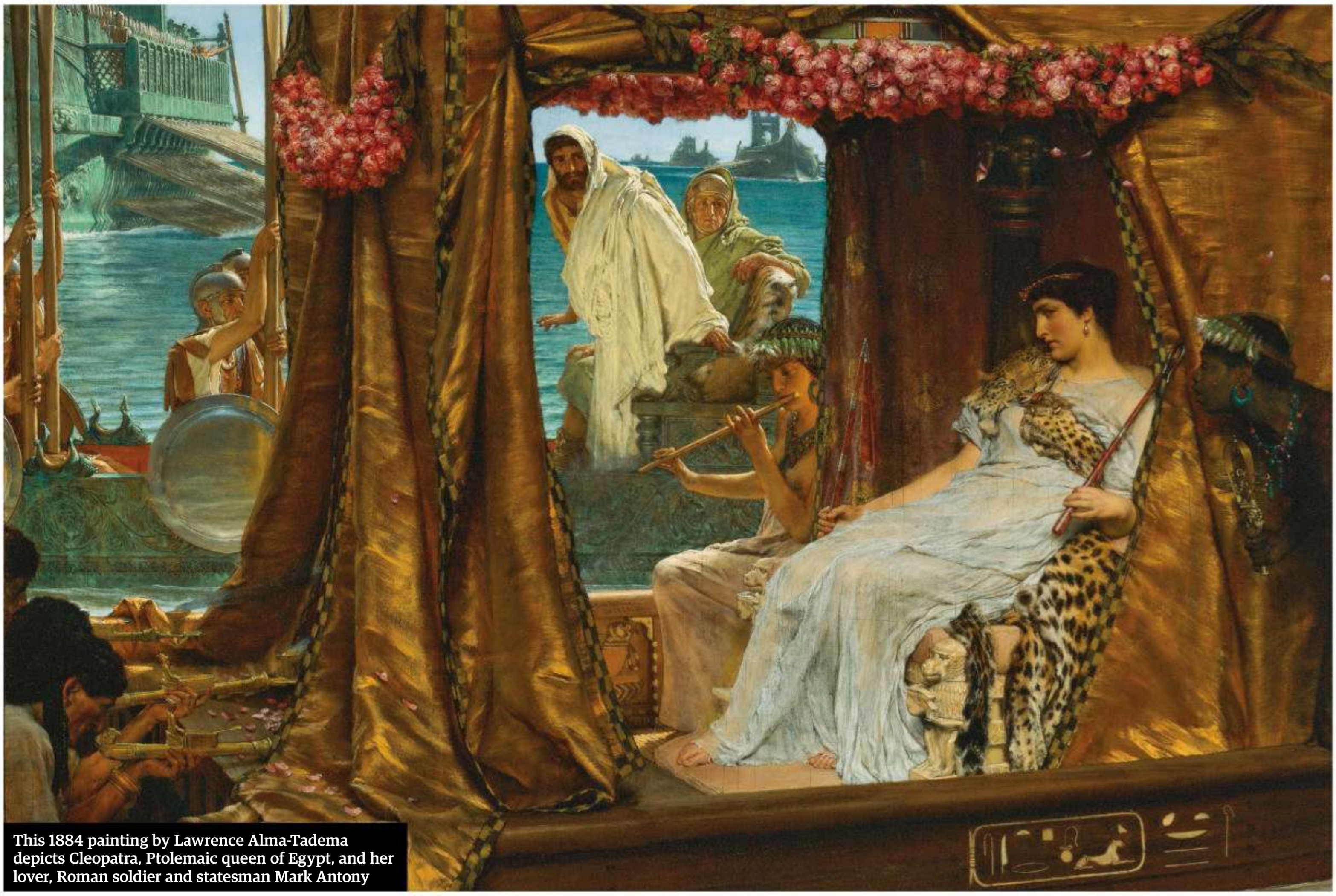
> "Alexander's untimely death left a power vacuum that eventually paved the way for the Roman conquest of Greece"

> The Colossus of Rhodes, which stood 33 metres tall at the harbour entrance, was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World

Among the youngest senior commanders in Alexander's army, Ptolemy I Soter came to power in Egypt, with his capital at Alexandria, in 305 BCE. Perhaps the most successful of the successor states spawned by Alexander's conquests, Ptolemaic Egypt was a centre of agriculture, as the cultivation of the fertile delta of the River Nile produced tremendous harvests of grain.

Eventually, Ptolemaic Greece and neighbouring Rhodes gained monopolies on the export of grain and fine wine from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, while explorers from the region learned the tendencies of the weather, and took advantage of monsoon winds to open a profitable seasonal trade protocol with the rich kingdoms of Arabia and the Indian subcontinent. Alexandria eclipsed Athens as the preeminent city of the Greek world, and by the time of the Roman conquest of Greece in the 1st century BCE, the metropolis boasted a population of approximately one million.

By the 3rd century BCE, Ptolemaic Greece was recognised as a strong naval power, however,



This 1884 painting by Lawrence Alma-Tadema depicts Cleopatra, Ptolemaic queen of Egypt, and her lover, Roman soldier and statesman Mark Antony continuing disputes with the neighbouring Seleucids and squabbles among the successors to the first Ptolemy brought the region into decline within 150 years of its founding.

In 279 BCE, Macedonia itself came under the control of Antigonus Gonatas, the grandson of one of Alexander's most trusted subordinates. Under Antigonus, Macedonia may have been perceived as somewhat backward, while the Seleucids and Ptolemaic Greeks spread their Hellenistic influence throughout the Mediterranean. On closer inspection, however, it has been concluded that the Macedonians, somewhat isolated in the mountains of northern Greece, exploited their resources of timber and silver in lucrative trade, and became quite prosperous.

Macedonia remained the centre of Greek military prowess, and Antigonus invaded Laconia. Under the aggressive leadership of King Philip V from 220 to 180 BCE, expeditions were undertaken against the Peloponnese, Ionia and the wealthy city of Pergamon in Asia Minor. The Macedonians fought the Romans three times during the 2nd century BCE, once forming an alliance with Carthaginian King Hannibal, who invaded Greece and laid siege to Athens.

Roman Athens and Sparta

Following their conquest of Greece, the Romans gave Athens the status of a free city, largely due to their immense respect for the educational opportunities afforded in the city's numerous schools. The Romans also admired Greek culture, including its architectural wonders. Construction on one of these located in Athens, the Temple of Olympian Zeus, was actually begun in the 6th century BCE, and completed during the reign of Roman emperor Hadrian in the 2nd century CE, more than 600 years later. Hadrian visited Athens in 124 CE, and returned to dedicate the temple in 132 CE. Meanwhile, Hadrian also authorised the construction of numerous other buildings and an aqueduct. The grateful people of Athens erected a statue to honour the Roman emperor.

During the Punic Wars against Hannibal and the Carthaginians, Sparta allied with Rome, but its later defeat at the hands of a Roman-led coalition in the Laconian War relegated it to the status of a second-rate power. Like the Athenians, Spartan citizens continued with their own way of life while under Roman rule. It is said that wealthy Romans actually travelled to Sparta to observe some of the foreign customs that were in practice there, making the city an early tourist attraction.

The ruins of the Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens include 16 surviving Corinthian columns

Centred at Pergamon, Attalid Greece was founded by Philetairos, the secretary to yet another of Alexander's generals, Lysimachus. When Lysimachus was killed in battle against the Seleucids, Philetairos withdrew with the funds that remained in his former employer's coffers, and organised the forces around him to repulse an invasion of western Anatolia by the Gauls in 270 BCE. Philetairos grew in stature, and the people of the Greek cities along coastal Anatolia hailed him as a hero.

When Philetairos died in 263 BCE, he was succeeded by his nephew, Eumenes I, the son of Philetairos's brother, Attalus I. Eumenes had three brothers, and rather than fighting among themselves, the siblings chose to cooperate, ruling successively. By 190 BCE, the Attalids dominated the west coast of Anatolia and much of mountainous Phrygia, a region of the interior of present-day Turkey. The Attalids competed with the other successor states economically, and became known for their fine tapestries and pottery. They traded with Eastern realms via an overland road across Anatolia. They also maintained good diplomatic relations with Rome, helping to ensure their prosperity.

Traditional Greek city-states organised into the Aetolian League in the central Peloponnesus and into the rival Achaean League, although Athens, Sparta and Rhodes managed to remain somewhat independent after the death of Alexander. Their influence in broader affairs, however, had waned substantially. With the advent of Roman rule, life in Athens - renowned as a centre of education - and Sparta - legendary for its unique society - was allowed to continue with little interference.

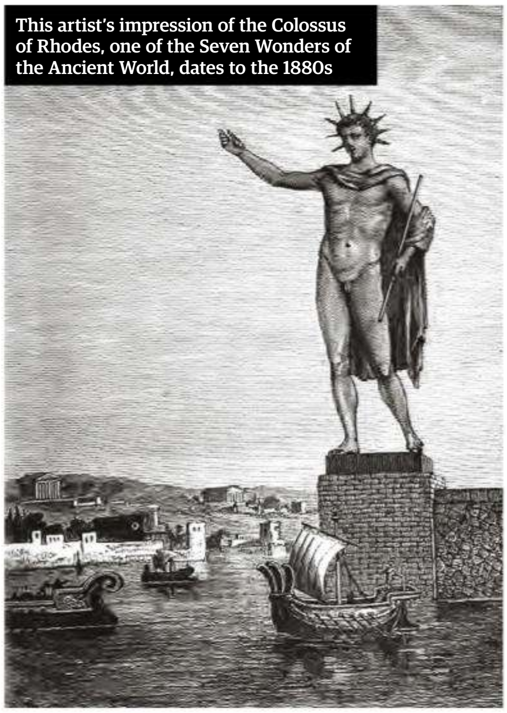
THE ROMAN REACH

The eastward expansion of its empire inevitably brought Rome into contact with the flourishing cities and colonies either founded by the Greeks or influenced by Greek immigration. First, the Romans encroached on the settlements on the Italian mainland. Eventually, they reached the states of Hellenistic Greece.

> The Romans embraced aspects of Greek culture, adopting many Greek gods, myths and religious practices as their own

In 195 BCE, a coalition of Rome, Macedonia, the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues, Pergamon and Rhodes defeated Sparta in the Laconian War, forcing the Spartans to join the Achaean League, and ending the once-dominant city-state's long tenure as a major power in Greece.

Roman hegemony over the Greek peninsula was effectively won on the battlefield in 146 BCE, when the legions of Lucius Mummius Achaicus defeated Corinth and the allied Achaean League. In the aftermath of the Battle of Corinth, the city itself was utterly destroyed. The alliance of King Philip V with Hannibal during the Punic Wars contributed to the downfall of Macedonia. About the time of the demise of Corinth, Macedonia's status was diminished to that of the first Roman province in the Aegean world.



This artist's impression of the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, dates to the 1880s

King Attalus III bequeathed the wealth of Attalid Pergamon to the Roman Republic in his will in order to prevent divisive feuding that might otherwise have erupted after his demise. When he died in 133 BCE, Roman troops solidified the gain, and the territories of Pergamon became the Roman province of Asia, one of the wealthiest in the Empire.

A century of infighting had completely torn the Seleucid dynasty apart by 140 BCE, and while the Romans considered the Seleucids a military threat for several decades, it was not until 66 BCE that Pompey the Great brought the remains of Seleucid Syria into the Roman fold. The last ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt, the famed Cleopatra, manipulated relationships with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony in order to maintain influence with Rome. Her illusion was completely shattered when Octavian's fleet destroyed the navy of Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE. Egypt subsequently became a Roman possession.

With the death of Cleopatra in 30 BCE, the last of the great ruling dynasties of the Eastern Mediterranean spawned by Macedonian expansion came to an end. Greek influence, however, remained very much alive, shaping Roman culture and subsequently the broader Western-world view ever since.

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MYTHOLOGY & RELIGION

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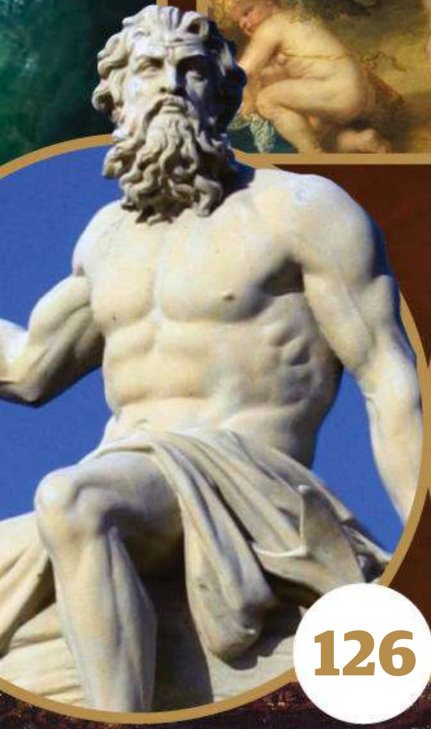

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The Greeks and their religion

Ancient Greek religion was diverse, contradictory, and endlessly inventive, much like the Greeks themselves

Greek religion had no formal set of beliefs or practices to which all had to conform or accept. The Greeks had their mythological stories, many of which were shared all over their country, but they did not develop a rigorous system of beliefs about them. The Greeks, for example, had no one sacred text, such as the Bible, at the core of their religion. Often Greek myths differed from place to place, as well as the particular stories told about the gods and heroes.

Sometimes these stories were wildly contradictory of others. Several gods had clearly overlapping areas of authority that could not be reconciled. Greek mythology was the product of centuries of unregulated storytelling by some of history's most creative and innovative people. Their myths explained the origins of the gods, the nature of the world in which the Greeks lived, and what they believed to be their history. If their mythology might appear to be lacking coherence at times, that is a modern judgement that would have puzzled the Greeks themselves.

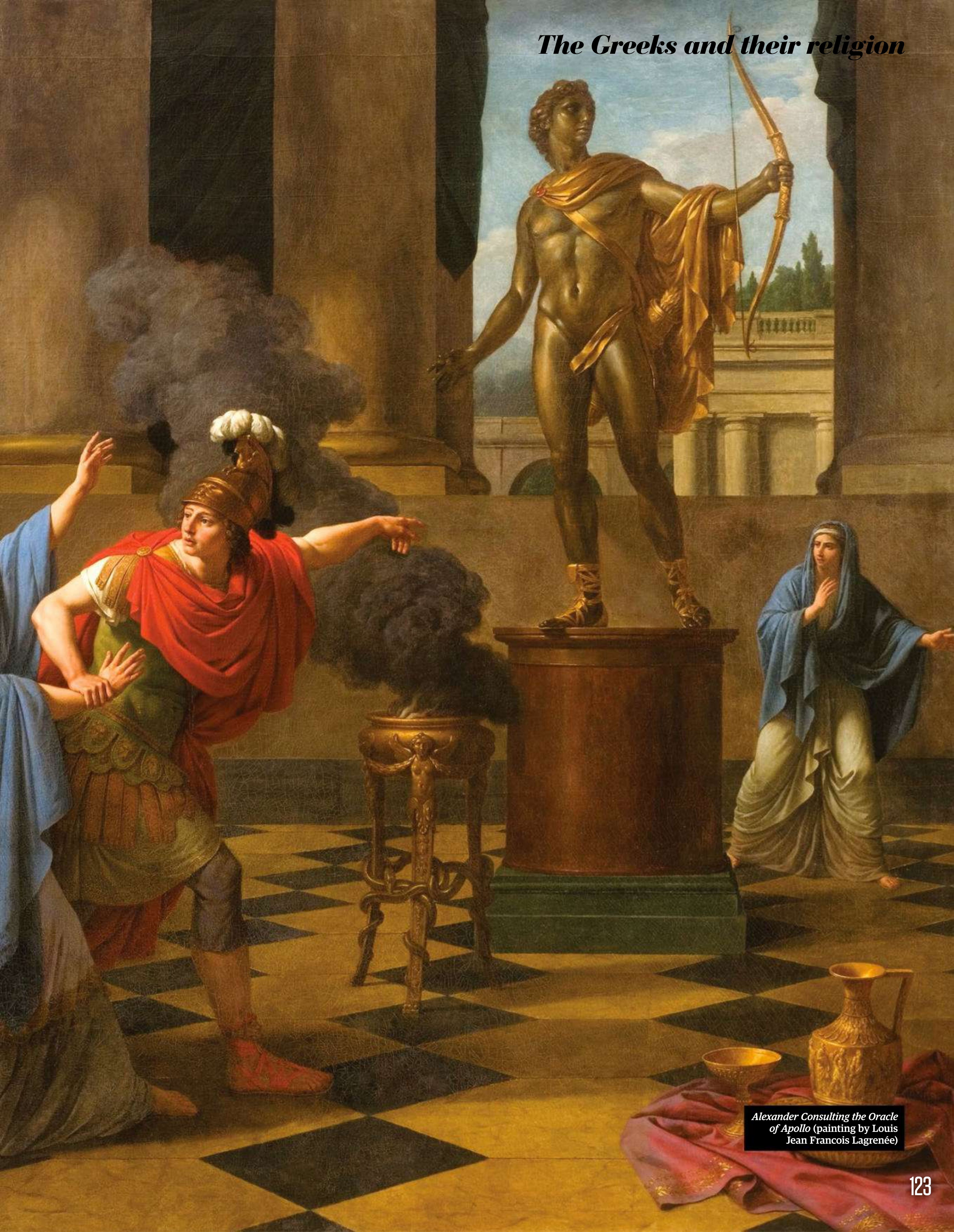
Furthermore, unlike the case in modern times, the Ancient Greeks lacked a concept of a clear division between the realm of religion and that of non-religious life. For them, it was a seamless whole, with the gods, of which there were many, demanding and receiving the worship and sacrifice delivered by both the state and by private individuals regularly.

In fact, the Greeks had no specific word for 'religion' as we might understand it. Religion was simply part of their everyday life. Rituals were conducted at all important public and private events and a deity was routinely consulted before any major undertaking. A fortunate result in one's life was often responded to with a votive offering to a god, vows of thanks, or some other public form of recognition of the particular deity to whom success was owed.

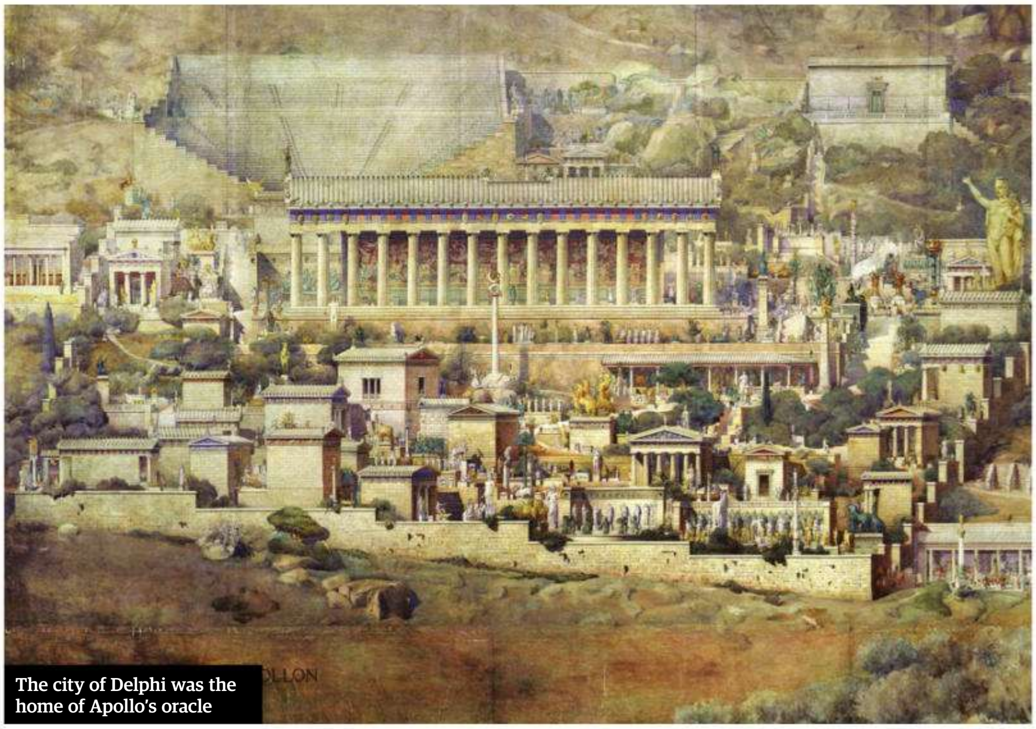
> Families believed that they might be able to find one another in the afterlife if the members were buried close to one another

There were 12 major gods and goddesses of the Greeks. These were the Olympians, so named because they reside atop Mount Olympus. Zeus was the lord and master of them all. Hera, his wife (and sister) was his queen. With him also was Aphrodite, goddess of love, bright Apollo, and his virgin sister Artemis the Huntress. Demeter, goddess of growing things, was there also. Athena there was, the goddess of wisdom and patroness of heroes. Hephaestus too was an Olympian. He was the lame but matchless smith of the gods. Hermes was Zeus' fleet-footed messenger. Brutal Ares was the lord of war, while Poseidon was the god of the sea and its creatures. Rounding out the Olympian pantheon was Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry.

In addition to the mighty Olympians, the Greeks had hundreds of other lesser deities. Having so



Alexander Consulting the Oracle of Apollo (painting by Louis Jean Francois Lagrenée)



The city of Delphi was the home of Apollo's oracle

The Olympic Games

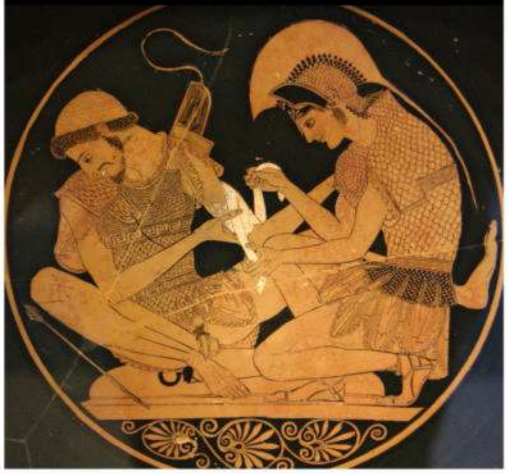
One festival that was attended by Greeks of all the cities was the Olympia in honour of Zeus Olympios (of Mount Olympus). First recorded as taking place in 776 BCE at Olympia, the Olympic Games were held every four years and only Greeks were allowed to attend them. The games initially involved just one event, a foot race, but over time, several other competitions were added to the Olympic programme.

Though it was an athletic competition, the religious nature of the festival was always present. The Olympia began with sacrifices and prayers offered to Zeus. Next, all of the competitors swore an oath before Zeus' altar and statue. Breaking this oath might result in a stiff fine or disqualification. There were then two further public sacrifices, with one conducted on the day of the full moon and the second on the last day of the festival.

While the games were being held, all of the states of Greece were bound to observe an armistice. This sacred truce was implemented so that competitors and others travelling to watch the games could attend them without fear of harm befalling them.

Only Greeks were allowed to compete in the games at Olympia

One of the main sources of Greek ideas about the gods was the *Iliad*, Homer's epic poem about the Trojan War.



> "There were 12 major gods and goddesses of the Greeks. These were the Olympians"

many gods of their own meant they were relatively open-minded when it came to the gods of non-Greeks. They readily identified or equated foreign gods with similar ones of their own pantheon. They had no cause to deny the existence of anyone else's gods. The easy-going attitude toward the deities of foreign peoples did not mean the Greeks were unserious about religion. Religious practices were taken very seriously. Treaties between city-states were solemnised by oaths sworn by the gods as well as sacrifices. Breaking such a treaty might bring about a terrible disaster.

The gods of the Greeks had their own priests and priestesses. These men and women oversaw the rites performed in honour of the gods and tended their temples, shrines, and sanctuaries. They did not involve themselves with the spiritual concerns of the worshippers. There was little in the way of formal doctrine for priests to know or follow. There were several features to worship that all Greeks had in common.

PRAYING

Prayers were the usual means by which people communicated with the gods. The primary parts of a prayer were the invocation, in which the person called upon the deity using his name, title, and abode; the argument, in which the supplicant gave reasons to the god as to why he should help, which might include a recitation of good deeds performed by the mortal or making a note that the god was known for his helpfulness; and the prayer itself, which was a request for some kind of divine aid. Many kinds of relief might be sought, such as an end to sickness or drought.

PURIFICATION

The cleansing of the community from pollution (or miasma), was of enormous importance to the Greeks. Private individuals might be purified by washing. Often purification was undertaken before some important action or perhaps as required by the calendar. The Athenian Assembly underwent ritual purification before the beginning of a meeting by having a sacrificed piglet carried around the members. Sometimes a community might undergo a mass purification driving out human scapegoats.

Ritual purification could be effected by washing or sprinkling. Fumigation was also used, along with seawater and water drawn from a sacred spring. Sacrifices would also suffice for purification, with the blood of the victim used to wash away the pollution of an unclean person.

SACRIFICES

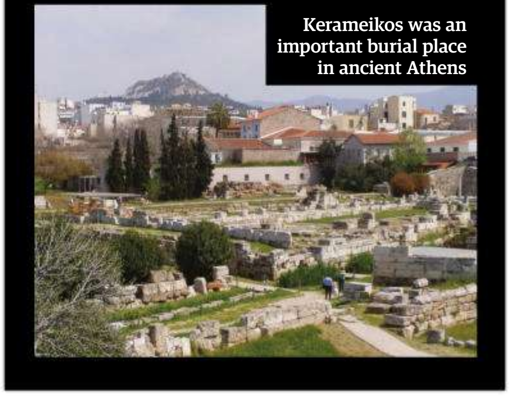
Sacrifices were of vast importance in Greek worship. Both animals and vegetables were seen as appropriate sacrifices to the gods. With animals, the victim was brought to the altar of a god in a procession where it was sprinkled with water. These drops caused the animal to nod, which to the Greek mind was its acceptance of its sacrifice. Hair was then cut from the animal and a prayer was said to indicate what the sacrificer wished for in return for the sacrifice. The animal was dispatched via a cut to the throat and its meat divided out into portions. The first was for the god. The second, the entrails, were roasted and eaten by the participants of the sacrifice. The rest of the meat was then boiled and given out to those present at the ritual.

Crossing over

The Greeks believed that the dead needed help in crossing the boundary between the world of the living and Hades, the gloomy realm of the dead. Those left behind sought to bury the dead as quickly as they could, or else the unburied dead would be condemned to roam for many years along the banks of the Styx, the river that marked the boundary between them and Hades.

The retrieval of the bodies of the dead and their proper burial was of tremendous importance to the living. In 405 BCE, ten Athenian admirals won a great naval victory at Arginusae but failed to collect the corpses of their slain sailors on account of a storm that came up suddenly. On their return to Athens they were put on trial for dereliction of duty despite having won the battle. Several of the admirals were executed.

Within days of death, the body was to be buried, with the corpse being carried to the place of burial. Both bodily burial and cremation were available, with cremation thought to be more prestigious. The ashes of the dead were placed in an urn which was itself then buried. Most Athenian burials took place on the roads leading out of the city. Burials inside the city were not allowed because of a wish to avoid pollution by the dead. After interment, the graves were not forgotten, but were tended to regularly by the surviving relatives, especially by the women of the family.


Kerameikos was an important burial place in ancient Athens

FESTIVALS

Festivals were important parts of Greek public religion. Hundreds of public religious festivals were held every year by the various communities of Ancient Greece. About one in every three days of the year was devoted to a festival of one kind or another. Though particular practices and the deities most prominently honoured might vary from city to city, religion was a central element that served to distinguish Greeks from non-Greeks.

The basic features of a festival were the procession, the sacrifice, and the feast. Outside of these, local practices could differ widely. Most festivals owed their origins to agricultural rituals carried out to ensure a bountiful harvest. They were typically held seasonally, with the Thesmophoria held in honour of Demeter, mostly taking place in the autumn.

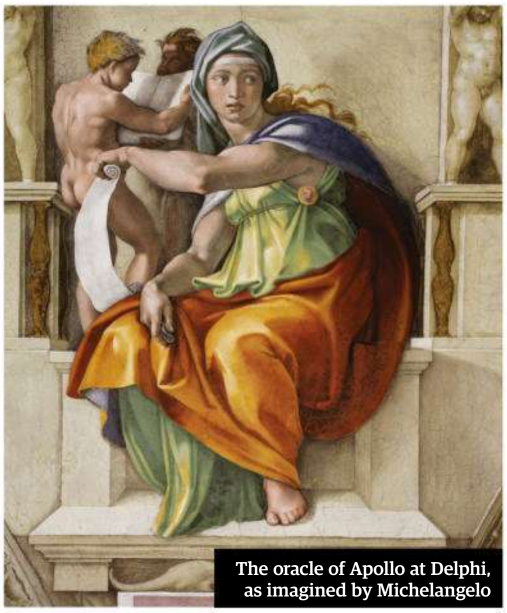
Another important festival was the Great Dionysia held annually in Athens. Athens was particularly fond of festivals, and was said to have held twice as many as any other city in Greece. Plays formed an important part of the Dionysia, with four days devoted to such presentations, three for tragedies and the fourth and last was reserved for comedies.

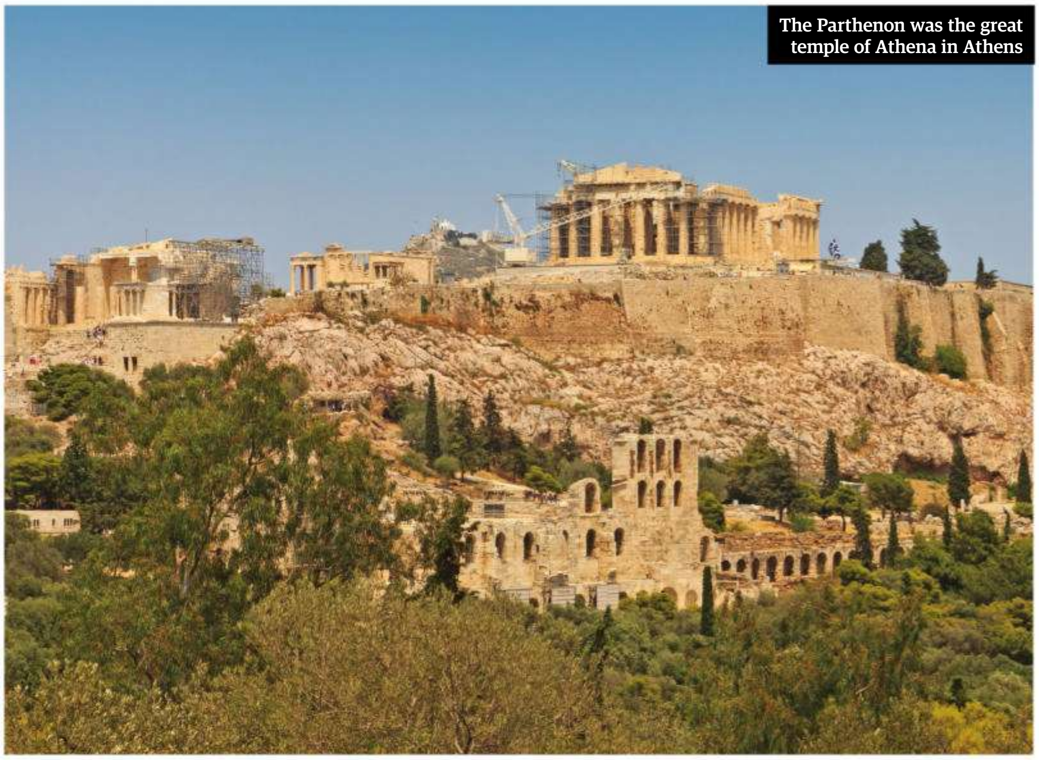
ORACLES

As might be imagined, with sickness and death ever-present in ancient times, the Greeks were often very anxious about the future. The reasonable desire for reassurance led many to seek out advice from the gods, which was obtained through their oracles. There were ten such oracles who foretold the future, after a fashion, for mortal men. Foremost among these was the oracle of Delphi, where the Pythia, a priestess of Apollo, delivered her pronouncements on behalf of the god. In words attributed to Apollo himself, the very purpose of the construction of his temple there was so that he could give 'unfailing advice through prophetic responses' in it. Another famous oracular shrine was that of Zeus found at Dodona in Epirus. Questions put to the god's oracle were often very personal, such as whether the supplicant should get married or make a voyage across the sea. The response was usually simply yes or no.

Sometimes the answers could be more complicated and have major consequences. Right before the mighty Persians invaded Greece for a second time in 480 BCE, the Athenians consulted the oracle at Delphi. The Athenians knew that their situation was dire, and some were even considering packing up and leaving for safety in Italy. The historian Herodotus tells us that the priestess Aristonice told them that 'only the wooden wall shall not fall.' This baffling response was open to many interpretations, but Themistocles, the leading man at Athens, cleverly interpreted this to mean that they would have to rely on their navy, the ships themselves being made of wood, to fend off the Persians. The Athenians would go on to lead the combined Greek fleet to a great naval victory at Salamis soon afterward.

Apollo's oracle at Delphi continued to offer pronouncements until the shrine was destroyed by the invading Heruli in 267 CE


The oracle of Apollo at Delphi, as imagined by Michelangelo


The Parthenon was the great temple of Athena in Athens

The gods themselves

Greek myths ran the gamut from the beginning of the world to the Fall of Troy. Below are a selection of some of the most famous of all stories of the gods and goddesses of Greece and their historical legacy

IN THE BEGINNING…

The poet Hesiod wrote in his *Theogony* that in the beginning there was only Chaos. Gaia, or Earth, then arose, followed by Eros, or Love. Chaos birthed Erebus and Night, while Gaia gave birth to Uranus, the sky. The sons of Gaia and Uranus were the Titans, of which there were 12, including Oceanus, Cronus, and Rhea. Gaia and Uranus also produced a trio of monsters, Cottus, Briareus, and Gyges. A revolted Uranus imprisoned these monsters within the earth but Gaia sought revenge for what he had done to her children. She devised a plan, which only one of her children agreed to carry out. Cronus took a knife given to him by his mother and used it to carve up the body of Uranus while he slept. He threw his father's bloody genitals into the waves, thereby producing the goddess Aphrodite as they mingled with the sea-foam. As drops of Uranus's blood spilled to the ground they gave birth to the Furies, deities of vengeance who would take revenge upon the murderers of kin.

THE EARLIEST GODS

Cronus, having deposed his father Uranus, ruled at the head of his brothers and sisters, the Titans. The world itself became more fully developed during his reign and he took to wife his sister Rhea, who bore him the goddesses Hestia, Hera, and Demeter, as well as three sons, who were Poseidon, and Hades, and Zeus. Cronus had been given an oracle that predicted that he would be overthrown by one of his children, just as he had supplanted his own father. So upon the birth of each, he swallowed the infant whole. In his belly, he reasoned, the children would be no threat to him.

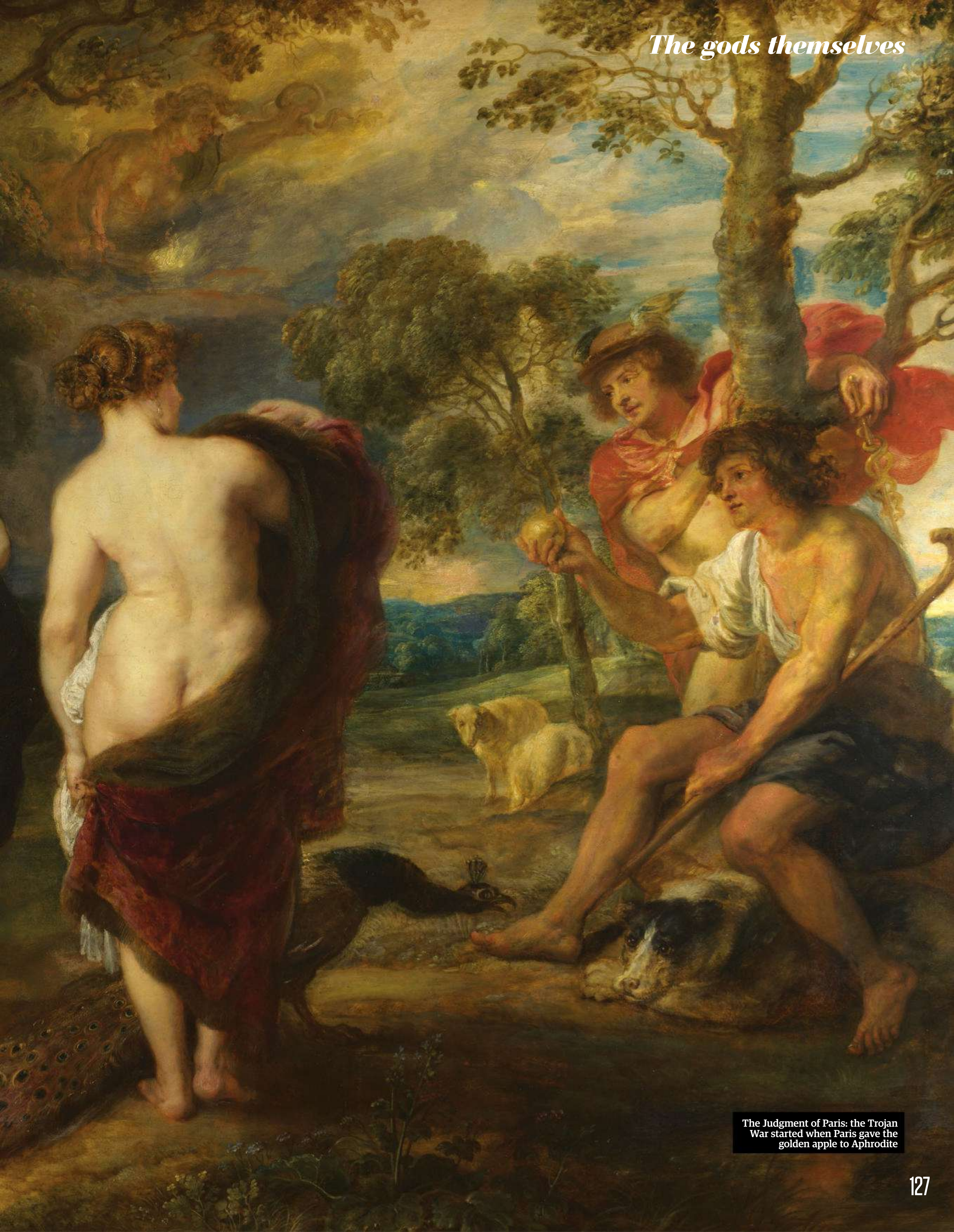
Rhea was understandably distraught at seeing each of her babies swallowed by her husband. When it came time for her son Zeus to be born, she went to the island of Crete, and there, in a dark cavern, birthed her boy in secret. Zeus was given to Gaia to be raised away from the eyes of Cronus. Rhea then returned to her husband and gave him a heavy stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. Cronus swallowed this immediately, without inspecting it to see what was inside.

Zeus was cared for and raised by the nymphs Adrasteia and Ida on Crete. He was suckled by the she-goat Amalthea. Once he was fully grown, Zeus sought to take vengeance against his father. With the help of the goddess Metis, he gave to Cronus a drink that made him vomit forth all of the children he had once swallowed. Zeus deposed him, just as the oracle had predicted, and Cronus was imprisoned beneath the earth. When the other Titans rebelled against the younger gods Zeus defeated them and incarcerated them far beneath the earth. Zeus now stood unchallenged as king of the gods who took as their abode Mount Olympus, the tallest peak in all of Greece.

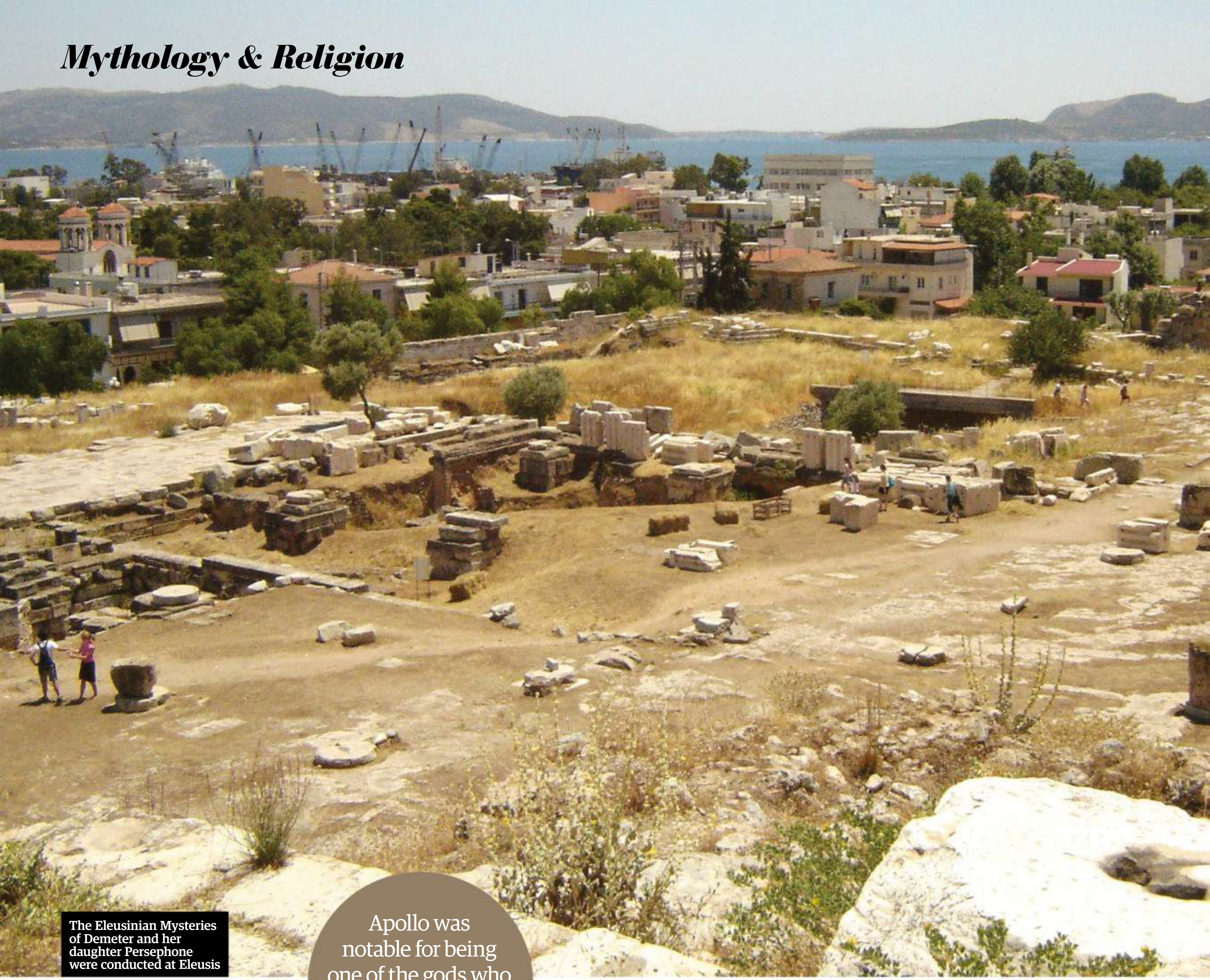
> Though an Olympian herself, little was thought or known about Hestia. She was the goddess of the hearth but had no temples

ZEUS, HIS LOVERS, AND HIS CHILDREN

Zeus would have many lovers, both immortal and mortal, and through them became the father of many gods, goddesses, and heroes. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, was his daughter by the goddess Metis. Just before she gave birth, Zeus swallowed the goddess whole. A little later, he came down with a horrific headache. Unable to bear the pain any longer, he had Hephaestus split open his skull to provide relief. Deed done, a warrior maiden



The Judgment of Paris: the Trojan War started when Paris gave the golden apple to Aphrodite



The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and her daughter Persephone were conducted at Eleusis

fully armed and wielding a spear leaped forth from Zeus's head. This was his daughter Athena. Upon the goddess Leto he fathered the Olympian brother and sister pair, Apollo and Artemis. Zeus was also the father of the god Dionysius by the mortal woman Semele and the goddess Hebe by his wife Hera.

By the mortal woman Alcmene Zeus had a son, Heracles. That Alcmene was already married at the time he had his amorous liaison with her did not bother Zeus overly. Heracles would go on to become one of the most popular deities of the Greeks in his own right. Hera, extremely jealous of Zeus's illicit progeny, sent snakes to kill Heracles when he was still a baby but Heracles killed them both. Hera next drove the adult Heracles mad, and in his madness he killed his wife and children. As punishment for his crime, he was set to do 12 labours, which gained him renown throughout Greece. Among these mighty deeds were his slayings of the Nemean Lion and the Lernaean Hydra, the capture of the Erymanthian Boar, and the cleansing of the Augean Stables. Hercules would later be raised to demigod status and live with the other gods on Olympus.

Apollo was notable for being one of the gods who cleansed mortals of religious pollution

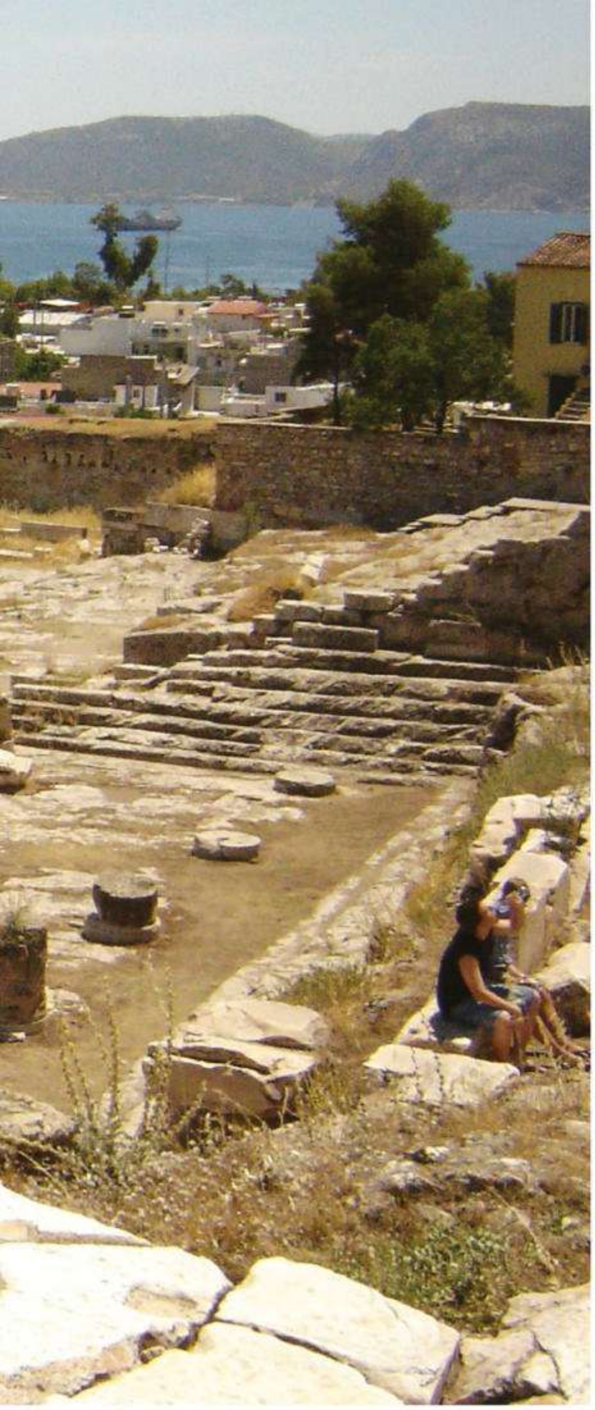
The nymph Callisto was a follower of the virgin huntress-goddess Artemis. Zeus impregnated her and Artemis found out. Artemis tried to shoot her with her arrows and to protect Callisto, Zeus turned her into a bear. Callisto perished, but birthed Zeus's son as she expired. The king of the gods placed Callisto in the sky as the Great Bear constellation.

Io was another nymph who caught Zeus's eye, and thereby earned the wrath of Hera. Zeus turned Io into a cow but Hera, not fooled, asked her philandering husband for it and he had no choice but to give it to her. Hera then tied Io, still a cow, to an olive tree and set the one hundred-eyed monster Argus to guard her. Zeus freed her and when Io eventually made her way to Egypt, Zeus turned her back into a woman. She would become the ancestral mother of the royal houses of Egypt, Crete, Phoenicia, Thebes, and Argos.

By the mortal woman Danae, Zeus fathered Perseus. Danae's father, King Acrisius of Argos, had been informed by the oracle at Delphi that Danae's son would grow up to kill him. He placed Danae and her infant into a chest and tossed it into the sea. Perseus would later go on to cut off the head of Medusa, and rescue the Ethiopian princess Andromeda from a terrifying sea monster. He would also be the cause of the death of his grandfather Acrisius, just as the oracle had foretold, when he threw a discus which accidentally struck and killed the old man.

Europa was a maiden of Phoenicia and sister to the king of Tyre. Zeus changed himself into a white bull and approached the young woman. She was mesmerised by the magnificent and gentle animal, and she climbed on its back. Soon, the bull had charged off toward the sea with the frightened Europa hanging onto its back until they made landfall on the island of Crete. On Europa Zeus fathered Minos, who would become a mighty king.

Zeus did not have only sons. By Demeter, the goddess of nature, he had Persephone, who was

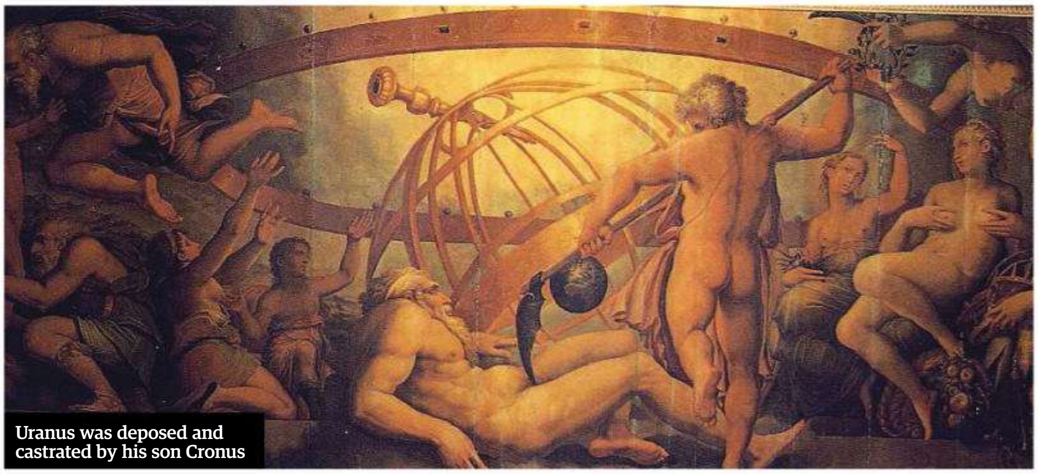


destined to become the Queen of the Underworld. One of his most famous children was Helen, the greatest mortal beauty in all the world. She had been married to Menelaus of Sparta but Paris, a son of the king of Troy, managed to steal her away and take her back home. The Greek effort to retrieve her began the Trojan War.

THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

Apart from the ordinary worship of the Olympian gods, some Greeks became initiates of the so-called 'mystery religions' present in their world. These religious practices were known as mysteries because, at the core, there was a central rite or experience to which the initiate had to be exposed. Often times these mysteries were the provinces of mother goddesses, such as Demeter, who was herself a version of the 'Great Goddess' who had once been the paramount deity among the earliest Greeks.

> Greeks would often liken foreign gods to their own. Zeus was equated with Amon



Uranus was deposed and castrated by his son Cronus

The most famous were the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter that took place in Eleusis near to Athens. These mystery rituals reenacted the sorrow of Demeter at being separated from her daughter Persephone after she had been abducted by Hades and taken to the Underworld, and then contrasted it with the soaring happiness that she felt at being reunited with her daughter.

THE THEFT OF FIRE

The first humans took their place in the world alongside all of its other creatures but they lived primitive lives of squalor not much different from the animals. The Titan Prometheus took pity on them and gave them some of his own essence, which made them intelligent and, quite unlike the animals, capable of speech. Yet now humans could fear what the next day might bring.

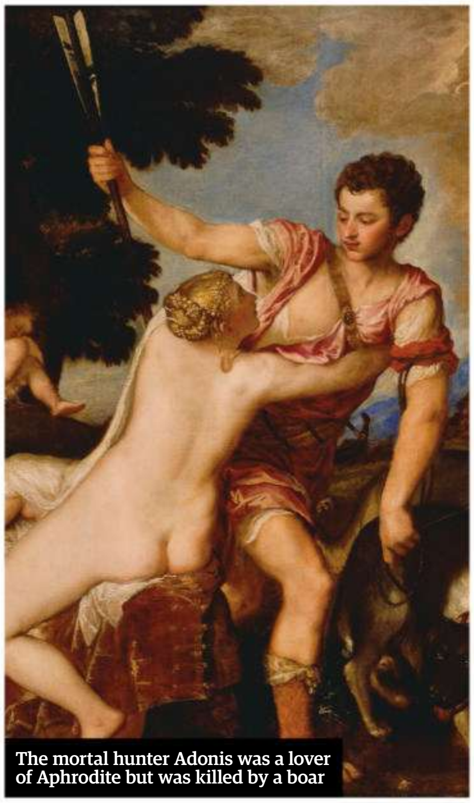
Prometheus, whose name means 'forethought,' taught men many things, including mathematics, medicine, and navigation. The kindly Titan sought next to aid them in one further way: he gifted them with fire. With fire men could cook their food and warm themselves on cold nights. Most importantly they could make proper sacrifices by burning the victims in honour of the gods. Human life was thereby much improved, but this fire had been stolen from Zeus who had withheld fire from mortal men. As punishment for this theft, Zeus chained Prometheus to a mountaintop in the Caucasus. Each day a giant eagle would come and rip out the Titan's liver with its beak. Overnight, Prometheus' liver would grow back, and the torment would repeat itself endlessly, day after day after day.

THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

Explaining the presence of evil in the world has always been problematic for people. For their part, the Ancient Greeks blamed one woman in particular for being the source of all the trouble in the world. This, the first woman, was fashioned by Hephaestus. The Olympians each bestowed on her a special gift, and her name, Pandora, means 'all gifts.'

The dying and rising god

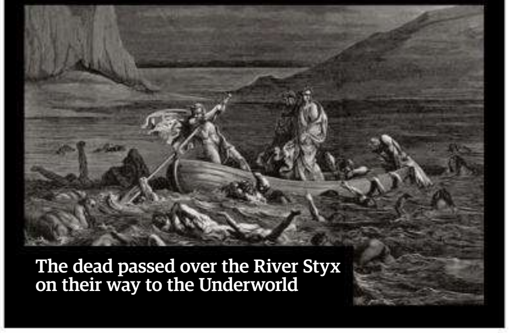
Adonis was a handsome mortal hunter who was beloved of both Aphrodite, goddess of love, and Persephone, goddess of the Underworld. Ares became jealous of Adonis's romance with Aphrodite, whom he himself desired. He turned himself into a wild boar and slew poor Adonis. Aphrodite and Persephone, who each wanted the deceased young man to herself, were persuaded by Zeus to share him. Adonis would spend half the year, restored to life, with Aphrodite, and the other half of the year with the Queen of the Underworld. Mythologically, Adonis was thus an example of a god of vegetation, which would flourish for part of the year, and then be dead for the rest, just as Adonis is alive with Aphrodite for a while but must then return to the realm of the dead to be with Persephone. Adonis, like vegetation, would die, and then rise again, in an endless cycle.



The mortal hunter Adonis was a lover of Aphrodite but was killed by a boar

Dead in Hades

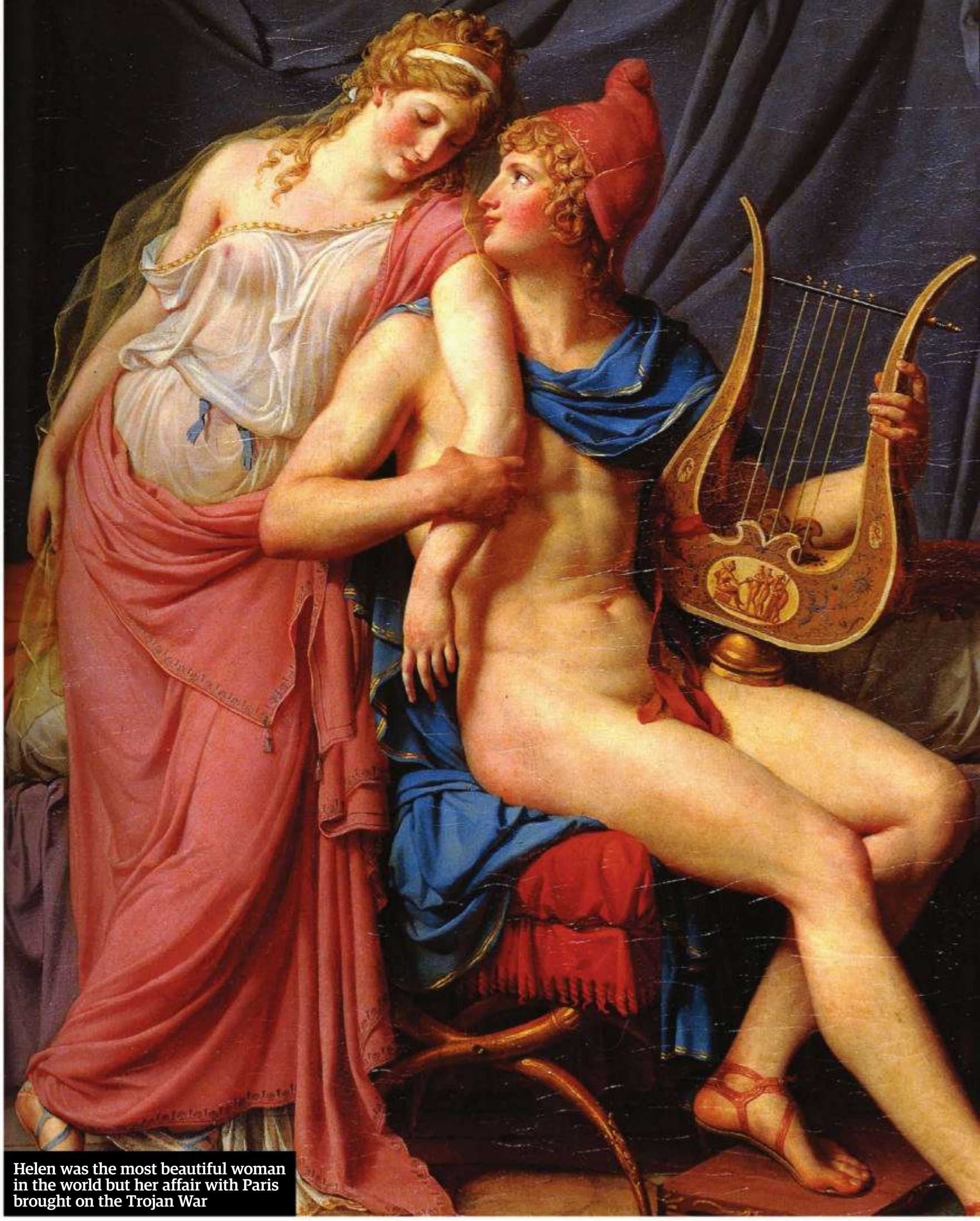
What was the afterlife really like? That is hard to say as the Greeks believed many different things about it and most of what we know is rather vague. Hades seems to have been a generally unpleasant and dreary place filled with the shades of the deceased. The gate to Hades was guarded by Cerberus, a huge, three-headed dog. Once in, the dead were not getting back out with Cerberus standing watch. Broadly, Hades was a place of extreme dullness. A few bad people were condemned to suffer unending punishment in Tartarus, while some others, lucky ones all, would spend eternity in the paradisiacal Elysian Fields.



The dead passed over the River Styx on their way to the Underworld

Pandora was herself made a gift to Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus. Epimetheus's name means 'afterthought,' and he did not see trouble coming. For the gods had also given Pandora one other gift, a sealed jar. Now Epimetheus's wife, she had been told not to peek inside the jar. Her curiosity got the better of her and she did so, opening its lid just a little, and out rushed all of the evils that now afflict the world.

Men before this had once lived lives of happiness and plenty. Now they would be stricken with diseases and famine and murder. Only one thing remained behind in the jar, the only good thing within it, and Pandora at last allowed that out too. This was Hope, which sustains humankind in its darkest hours.



Helen was the most beautiful woman in the world but her affair with Paris brought on the Trojan War

THE GREAT FLOOD

Like many other peoples the world over, the Greeks too had their own version of the Great Flood. In this myth, Zeus wanted to rid the earth of the nasty Race of Bronze men which was given to wickedness. Two humans survive this massive inundation of the entire world, a husband and wife named Deucalion and Pyrrha.

The couple escaped drowning by climbing inside a chest, which after a deluge of nine days and nights alighted atop Mount Parnassus. Deucalion made a sacrifice to Zeus, and the king of the gods granted him the boon of repopulating the emptied world. Deucalion did as Zeus bid him, and threw stones over his head. These became men, while those that Pyrrha tossed over hers all became women. Thereafter, the floodwaters began to drain away. All of the people of the world were thought by the Greeks to be descendants of Deucalion and Pyrrha.

Charon, the ferryman who transported the dead to Hades, charged for the ride, and so a Greek corpse had a small coin placed in its mouth

TAKING SIDES AT TROY

The gods were not above concerning themselves in the affairs of mortals. The Trojan War was perhaps the most famous example of a schism occurring between the gods as they chose sides in this mortal struggle. The war's origin lay in a quarrel between three goddesses, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. To a wedding feast at which the uninvited goddess of discord, Eris, appeared. She tossed an apple among the guests upon which was written 'for the fairest.'

Immediately, the goddesses began to squabble over who should receive the dubious gift. To settle the argument, they found a young shepherd named Paris, who was also the son of Priam, king of Troy. The goddesses each promised him something to win his vote, but it was the goddess of love's promise that he would have the loveliest woman in the world to be his own that sealed the deal. He gave the apple to Aphrodite, but his prize, Helen, was already married to Menelaus, king of Sparta.

Paris ran away with Helen and took her home to Troy, but Menelaus resolved to get his wife back. Menelaus's brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, was the high king of the Greeks, and at the head of a massive army mustered from all of Greece he sailed against Troy.

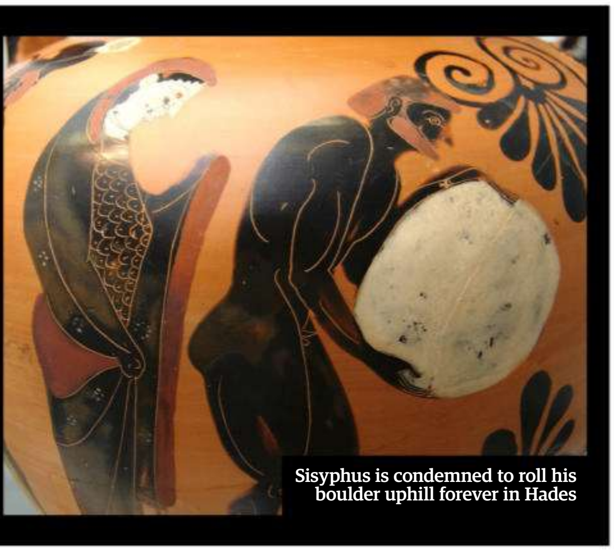
For ten years the Greeks besieged Troy, battling furiously but making little progress in their effort to regain Helen for Menelaus. Several of the Olympians favoured either the Greeks or the Trojans. Apollo struck the Greeks with a plague when they mistreated his priest. When Agamemnon angered Achilles, Achilles's mother Thetis convinced Zeus to give the Trojans the edge in the war temporarily. Aphrodite's son Aeneas was a Trojan prince and she fought on his behalf. Ares, the war god, battled beside the Trojans. Athena

Crime and punishment

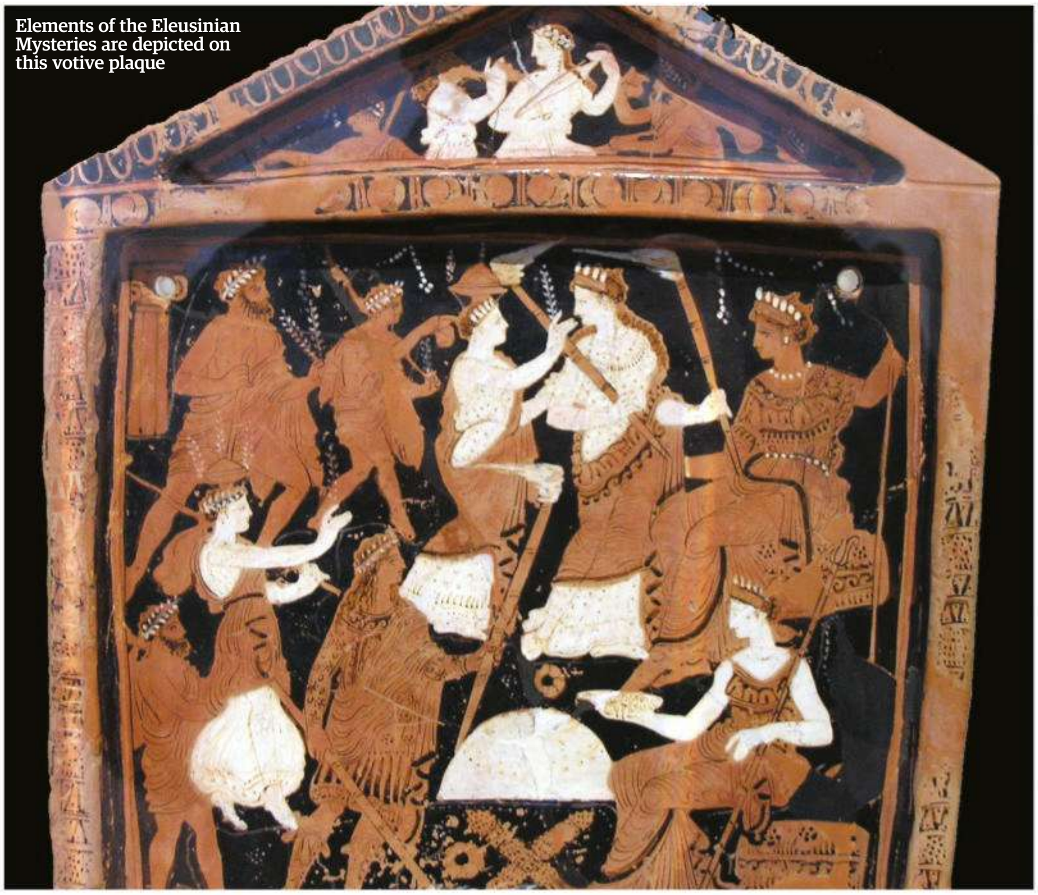
Some mortals were condemned to devastating punishments for their crimes. Among these were Lykaon, Tantalus, and Sisyphus. Lykaon tried to feed the king of the gods the cooked remains of a human child while Zeus was a guest in his house. This crime was doubly evil because it involved cannibalism as well as being a gross violation of the hospitality that a Greek was bound to show to a guest. Zeus was not fooled at all, and in retribution turned Lykaon into a wolf.

Tantalus, as a mortal son of Zeus, would often dine with the Olympians. But he gave to humankind ambrosia and nectar, the divine food and drink of the gods. For this transgression he was smote with an eternal punishment by his father. He was condemned to stand forever in a pool of water in the Underworld. Above him was a tree hanging with fruit. When he tried to reach up to take them so that he could eat, the bough rose far out of reach. When he bent down to drink, the water would drain away.

Sisyphus, before dying, had told his wife not to perform the customary funeral rites for him. When he reached the Underworld, he complained to Persephone that his body had been left unburied and asked that he be allowed to return to the world of the living to set things right. He was allowed to leave, but once out did not return to Hades in three days as he had promised. Hermes dragged the villainous Sisyphus back to the Underworld and there he received his punishment – to endlessly struggle to roll a giant boulder up a hill only to see it roll back down once he neared the top.



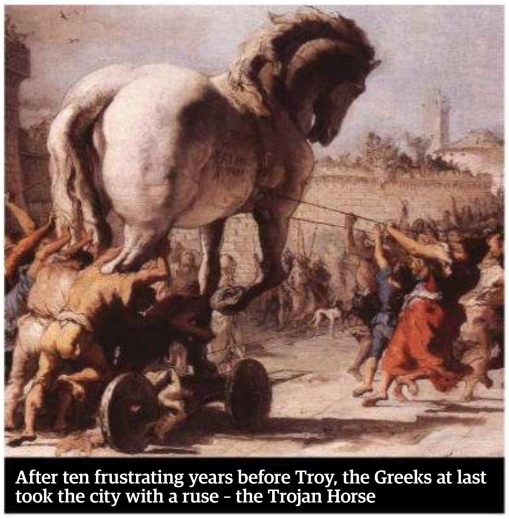
Sisyphus is condemned to roll his boulder uphill forever in Hades



Elements of the Eleusinian Mysteries are depicted on this votive plaque

The gods and the sick

Greeks took sick people to the temples of Asclepius, a god of healing, where they were left overnight. During sleep they hoped to receive a vision from the deity that would explain the cures for their illnesses. During waking hours they would be looked after by the temple's doctors. The Hippocratic Oath, still in use today, in which a physician swore to care for his patients to the best of his ability, was sworn in the names of Apollo and Asclepius as well as the goddesses Hygieia and Panakeia.



After ten frustrating years before Troy, the Greeks at last took the city with a ruse – the Trojan Horse

favoured the Greeks and helped both Achilles and Odysseus. Troy would fall at last when the Greeks built a giant wooden horse, hid some of their men inside it, and pretended to sail away, defeated. Thinking the horse was an offering, the Trojans pulled it within their walls. At night, the Greeks climbed out, opened the gates, and sacked the city.

ODYSSEUS'S ODYSSEY

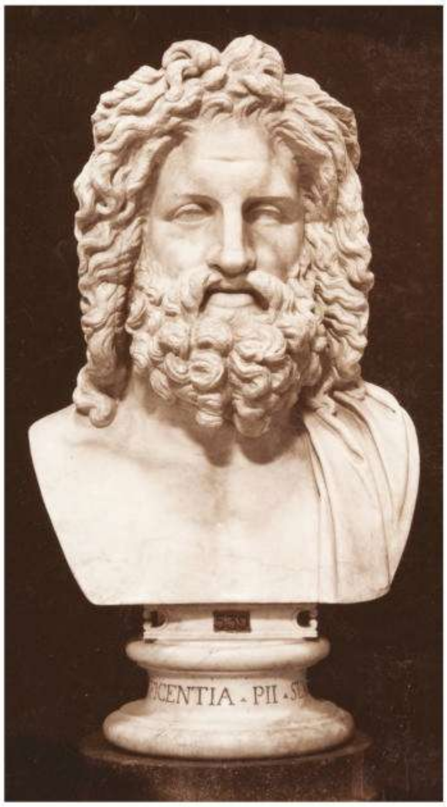
Though victorious, the Greeks would not necessarily enjoy their triumph. Agamemnon would be murdered shortly after he returned home to Mycenae. Odysseus, who had come up with the idea for the wooden horse, would spend another ten years wandering around the Mediterranean trying to make his way home to Ithaca. His long and strange journey home would be vexed by Poseidon, whose ire Odysseus earned by blinding Cyclops, the god's son. But Odysseus's divine patroness, Athena, would aid him.

GREEK RELIGION AND ROME

Greek myths had an enormous influence on the future superpower of the ancient world, Rome. Greeks began colonising parts of Italy and Sicily as far back as the 8th century BCE and their wonderful stories spread throughout the Italian peninsula. The Etruscans, living in what is now Tuscany, were especially taken with Greek myths, and would incorporate many motifs in their own art. The Romans went further, and made Greek mythology their own. Many old Italic deities were identified with their equivalents among the Greeks. Athena and Minerva were one, as were Ares and Mars, Zeus and Jupiter. Heracles, with a slight tweaking of his name, became Hercules. It would fall to the Roman poet Ovid in 1st century BCE to compose the definitive version of Greek mythology, the *Metamorphoses*.

The Twelve Olympians

The gods of Olympus were a fractious family of glorious, majestic, scheming and treacherous deities



Zeus

Lord of Olympus

Mighty Zeus was the lord and king of the Olympian gods and father of many gods and heroes. His domain was the sky and he was master of the weather. His animal was the eagle, the greatest of all birds. Zeus was the most powerful of all the gods, perhaps stronger than all of them put together. Yet he was not invincible, and he could not defy the wishes of his divine brethren with impunity.

Zeus oversaw oaths and hospitality. His divine radiance was enough to burn mere mortals to ashes. He also had a roving eye and would have many amorous trysts with nymphs and other women who were not his wife. Through Danae he would father the hero Perseus, slayer of serpent-crowned Medusa; Heracles, destined to become a demigod on Olympus, and Helen, the most beautiful woman of all. Zeus had many other dalliances besides the ones that produced such mighty children, and Hera, his wife, would seek vengeance for her humiliation by afflicting them.

Athena

Goddess of wisdom and war

Athena, goddess of wisdom, was the daughter of Zeus by the goddess Metis. The bright goddess was the deity of civilisation. Athena was a patroness of many Greek heroes. In the *Iliad*, we find her siding with the Greeks against the Trojans during their ten-year war in which she intervened directly to help them. One significant form of assistance came at the beginning of the *Iliad*; we find her restraining the warrior Achilles from killing Agamemnon. In the *Odyssey*, we see Athena helping another favourite, Odysseus, make his way from Troy to Ithaca.

She was the patron deity of Athens, the greatest of all Greek cities. In the 5th century BCE the Athenians would build the Parthenon, the most magnificent of all temples dedicated to her.

Athena was noble in aspect and demeanour, but could be harsh to those who displeased her. Tiresias had the misfortune to espy her while she bathed, and she struck the poor man blind for his transgression.

Aphrodite

Goddess of love

Aphrodite was the goddess of love and beauty. She was born out of the sea foam when Cronus tossed the severed genitals of Uranus into the waves, though another myth gives her a less gruesome birth, and makes her the daughter of Zeus and the goddess Dione. Her major cult centre was Cyprus where she is said to have been born.

Oddly, the loveliest of goddesses was married to the ugliest of gods, Hephaestus the lame smith of Olympus. She was not faithful to him, and was once caught naked in bed with Ares, the god of war, by a magic net fashioned by her cuckolded and outraged husband.

Aphrodite figured prominently in the start of the Trojan War. When she, Hera, and Athena each sought to claim the title of most beautiful, they had Paris, the son of the king of Troy, choose between them. Hera offered him power, Athena promised victory, but Aphrodite told him that she would make the most beautiful woman in the world his own…

Hera

Queen of the gods

Glorious Hera was both the wife and sister of Zeus and queen of the gods. Her purview was marriage and motherhood. Despite her position as wife to Zeus, she was hardly the happiest of wives. Her husband's philandering ways made her extremely jealous. She evidenced a particular hatred for Heracles, Zeus's son by the mortal woman Alcmene. Hera constantly sought to avenge her humiliation by Zeus by afflicting his son Heracles who had done her no harm. She despatched snakes to kill the boy when he was but an infant but her murderous plan was thwarted when little Heracles killed them both. She later made him go mad, and while he was insane, he killed his wife and children.

Hera could also be murderously jealous of Zeus' lovers. She persuaded Semele, the mother of the god Dionysus, to insist that Zeus appear to her in his full divine splendour. Reluctantly, he did so, and the poor woman was reduced to ash by his overpowering radiance.

The Twelve Olympians

Hermes

Messenger of the gods

Son of Zeus by the nymph Maia, Hermes was the god of messengers and travellers. He acted to guide others to their destinations. In the *Iliad* he brings King Priam of Troy through the Greek lines to meet with Achilles to recover the body of his slain son, Hector. When Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite needed to find their way to Mount Ida to participate in the Judgment of Paris, it was Hermes who led them there. It was Hermes too who conducted Persephone out of the Underworld of Hades back to her mother Demeter in the world of the living.

Demeter

The goddess of growing things

Demeter was the goddess of the earth, motherhood, fertility, and the harvest. As the ultimate source of the grain that the Greeks used to make their bread, she was enormously important to them. Her main festival was the Thesmophoria, held every autumn to ensure a good harvest.

Demeter figures prominently in the explanation for the seasons, and thus the annual cycles of birth, life, death, and rebirth seen in the natural world. The story begins when Hades, lord of the Underworld kingdom that also bore his name, stole the goddess's daughter Persephone.

Hephaestus

The smith of Olympus

Hephaestus was the great smith of the pantheon. Unlike the other gods who were physically perfect, Hephaestus was lame, and was thus the epitome of the outsider among the gods. He was cruelly mocked by the other gods for his deformity though they admired the products of his hands.

He was the patron of all who worked with metal. Learning that his faithless wife Aphrodite was making love to Ares, he made a magic net that fell upon them while they were abed. Thus trapped, he summoned the other Olympians to view and mock the adulterous pair.

Artemis

Virgin goddess of the hunt

Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo and daughter of Zeus by Letos. She was a virgin huntress – often depicted carrying a bow and arrows – and also the patroness of women undergoing childbirth. Being the goddess of virginity and a protector of young girls, she fiercely guarded her own modesty. When the unlucky hunter Actaeon stumbled upon her while she was bathing in a sacred spring, the goddess, outraged at having been seen unclothed, turned him into a stag for his transgression. His own hounds promptly tore him limb from limb.

Poseidon

Lord of the sea

Poseidon was the full brother of Zeus and son of Cronus. When the three brothers, Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, overthrew their father, Poseidon took the sea as his realm. Like the sea, Poseidon could be placid one moment and raging the next. His weapon and symbol of authority was the three-pronged trident. The vengeful Poseidon ensured that the Greek hero Odysseus would be delayed for years in returning to his home island of Ithaca for his blinding of the sea god's son, the Cyclops.

He was responsible for earthquakes, and was known as Earth-shaker among Greeks.

Ares

God of war

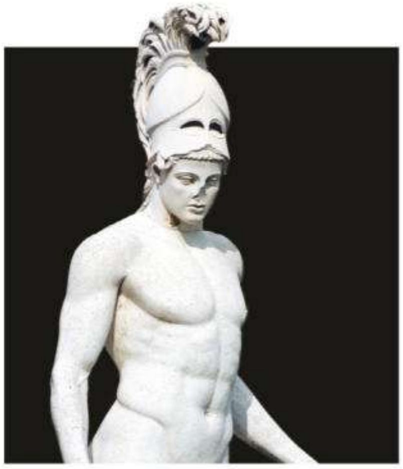
Ares was the god of war in all its fearsome brutality. He was the son of Zeus by his queen, Hera, but was little liked by his father and the other gods. The Greeks themselves had little love for the deity on account of the horrors that war brought with it.

One goddess that did favour Ares was Aphrodite, the love goddess, with whom he fathered four children, though she was at the time already married to Hephaestus. Two of these children were Phobos (Fear) and Deimos (Terror), each representing concepts closely associated with war.

Dionysus

God of wine and revelry

Dionysus was the god of wine and vine. He was the son of Zeus by the mortal woman Semele. The worship of him by his devotees was among the most startling of all the gods of Greece. Women figured prominently in his cult. The leaders, known as maenads, partook in ecstatic, sometimes violent, rituals in which they engaged in frenzied dancing and tore wild animals to pieces. Greek women would attend his ceremonies by going into the hills to engage in processions led by the maenads. There they would drink themselves to stupefaction in the Bacchanalia celebration.



Apollo

God of music, healing, and prophecy

Handsome Apollo had his two main cult centres in Greece at Delphi and on the island of Delos. At Delphi resided his chief oracle and priestess, the Pythia, also known as the Oracle of Delphi. There at his shrine she would receive petitioners seeking to question her about the future.

The weapon of Apollo was the bow. When his priest Chryses was mistreated by the Greeks at Troy, he struck down many of them with plague-carrying arrows. He was also said to pull the sun behind him in his airborne chariot.

Greek myths and monsters

For those living in Ancient Greece the myths that we still tell today were not simply stories, but an integral part of their society, culture and lives

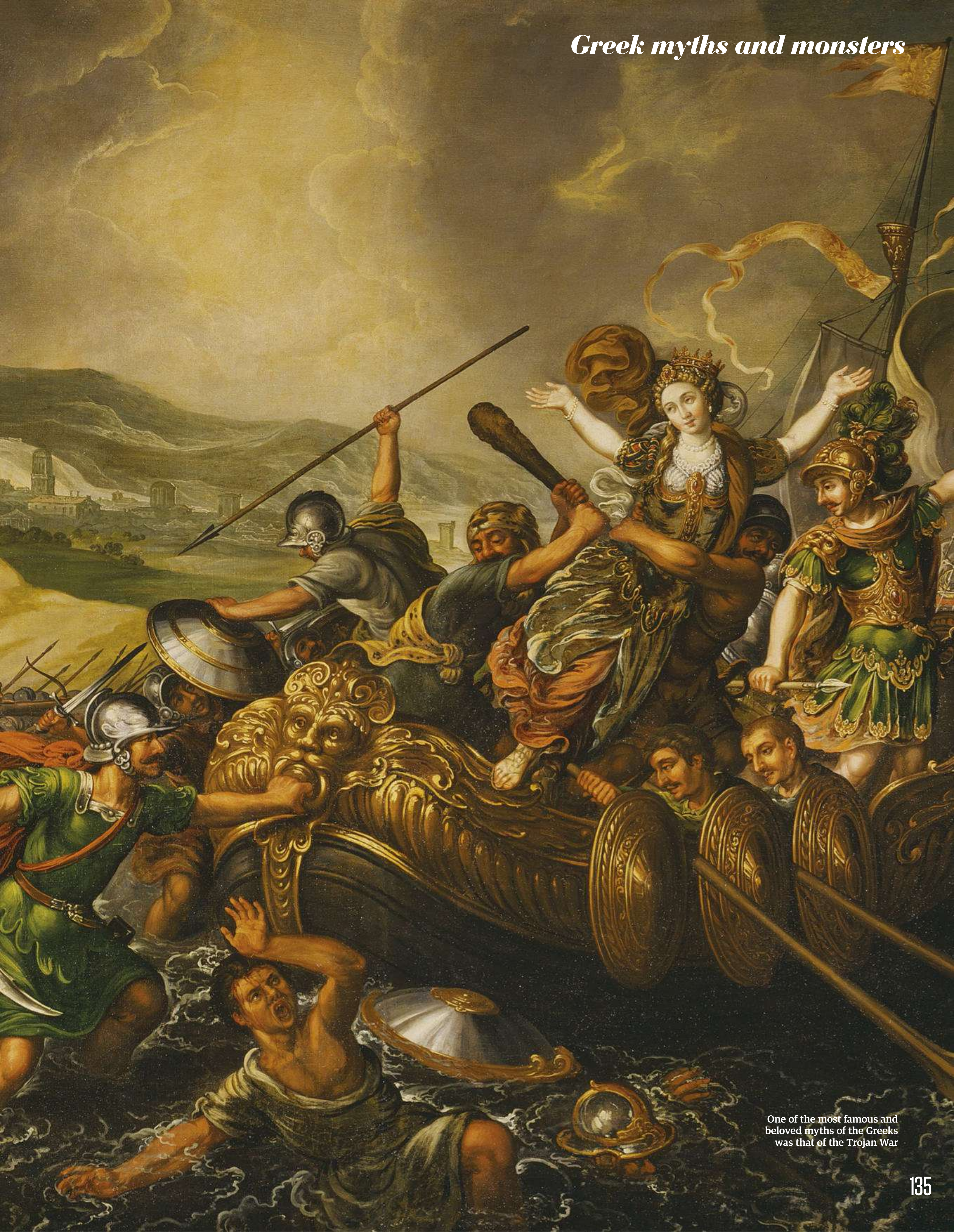
There are many ancient cultures, and most of these cultures have their own ancient mythologies. From the mighty Norse gods of Odin and Thor to the animal-like figures of the Egyptian religion, but none of these have proved as enduring as the tales and heroes of Greek mythology. With its cautionary tales of men and women who were led down dark paths by their own excess, mighty gods and beautiful goddesses and heroes who vanquished the most frightening of beasts, Greek mythology has proved itself so popular that even the rise of Christianity could not squash it.

Women are generally not portrayed well in Greek myth. The first woman, Pandora was responsible for unleashing evil in the world

This mythology was just as important to the Ancient Greeks. It provided a common history, heroes and religion to the many different tribes, uniting them together as one people. Not only did it help spread Greek as a language, but it also worked in tandem with the growth of their society, providing answers to huge questions about their place in the universe and why the planet behaved the way it did. Mythology became more than simply fantastical tales, it was integral to the Greeks' way of life, and it touched on every part of their society. Present from when the people woke in the morning to when they fell asleep, mythology was the beating heart of Ancient Greece.

As with almost all myths, tales and legends Greek mythology began life as an oral tradition. Without widespread literacy the stories were likely told to listeners by Bronze Age Minoan and Mycenaean bards. We know little about how this oral tradition developed, and while it is likely that tales became more embellished and differed by region, it is also possible that there were strict rules for story-telling. It wasn't until the 8th century BCE that these oral traditions were written down. The most famous of the early written sources of Greek mythology are Homer's epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, detailing the Trojan War and the story of Odysseus respectively. Another early source and basis for Greek mythology is Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* which concern the origin of the gods and the creation of man.

From this point onwards the representation and retelling of myths steamed forward with vigour. Epic duels between heroes and monsters, muses, gods and a cornucopia of mythical scenes and stories were painted on pottery of all kinds. These popular and portable forms of storytelling didn't require literate readers, and helped the myths spread wider afield. Many of some of the most well-known myths, such as the trials of Hercules, were found on pottery, rather than literary texts. Many more pottery pieces pre-date the first recorded literary versions of the same tales. Myths then began to permeate the very structures of Greek civilisation, public buildings like the Parthenon, the Temple of Apollo and the Temple of Zeus were adorned with painstakingly

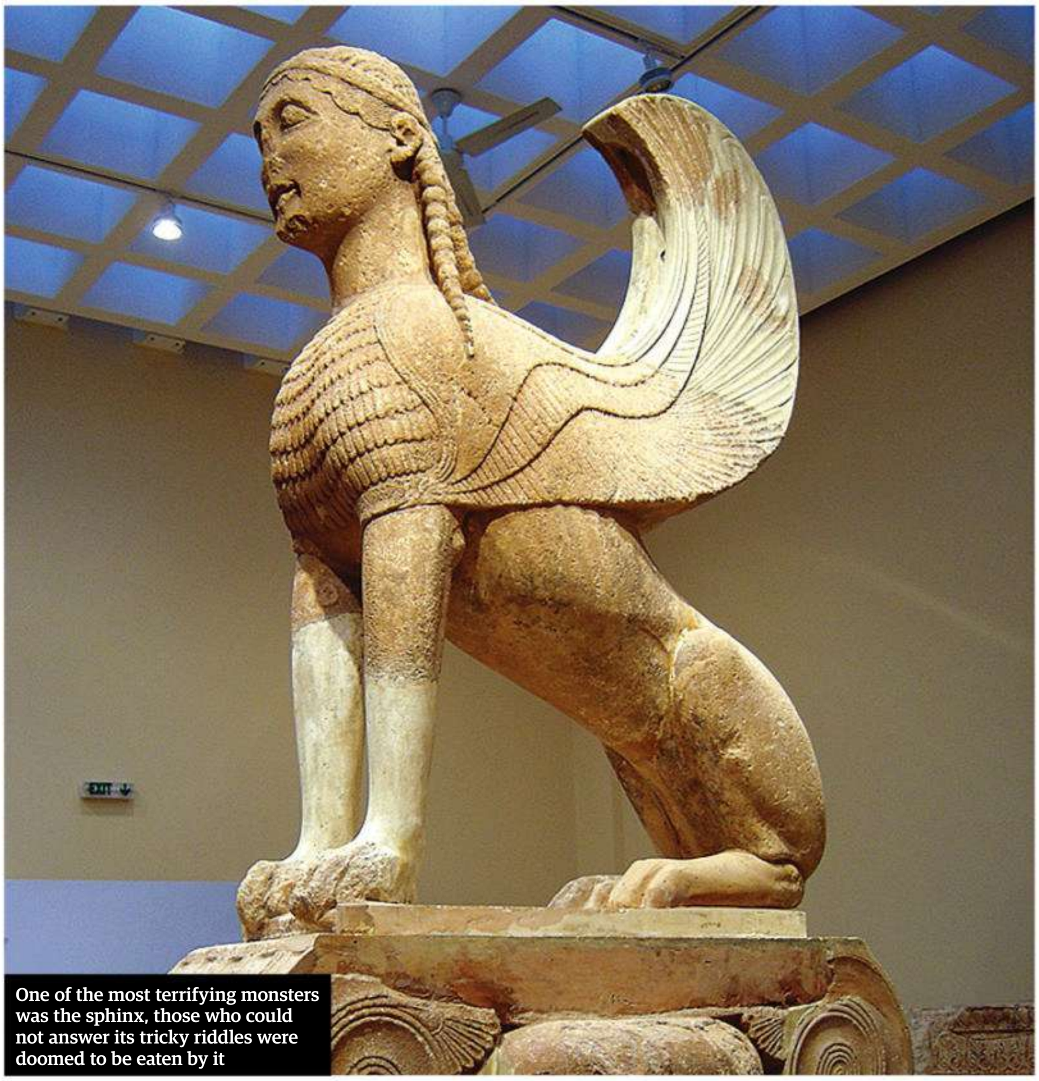


One of the most famous and beloved myths of the Greeks was that of the Trojan War crafted statues and images from mythology. These tales of heroes and monsters were not campfire stories, but a very central, crucial part of Greek culture and civilisation. In the 5th century the beloved myths were reborn in theatre, by the work of the tragic writers Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The figures from myth and legend were made real, dramatised in front of thousands of eager viewers who would fill stadiums to see the stories they already knew retold again and again. Mythology for the Ancient Greeks was more than religion, more than entertainment, it permeated every part of their lives. Although it would be wrong to assume every Greek was a fervent believer, their importance in society and the significance they held in the culture itself is clear to see, even today.

Like most religions and mythologies, the myths set out to answer some of the deepest questions of the human existence, most notably - where did we come from? Who made the world? The Greeks explained this with 'Chaos' a yawning void of nothingness from which sprung Gaia (the Earth) and other divine beings. The story goes on to tell tales of repeated father-son usurping, a relatable story for the patriarchal society of heirs and inherited power. Like many Greek myths, although the stories themselves are fantastical (like Zeus swallowing his wife to avoid being usurped by his own offspring) the key themes and morals are relatable, which is likely why they resonated so strongly with the people.

The Ancient Greeks were a society that were led by philosophy and science. They were driven by pursuits of the mind and were quick to question the nature of the world. This can certainly explain why so many Greek myths provide explanations for natural phenomena. Although they are far from scientific, the myths provide answers to a curious nation for some of the basic aspects of

> "They were driven by pursuits of the mind and were quick to question the nature of the world"



One of the most terrifying monsters was the sphinx, those who could not answer its tricky riddles were doomed to be eaten by it

Perseus and Medusa

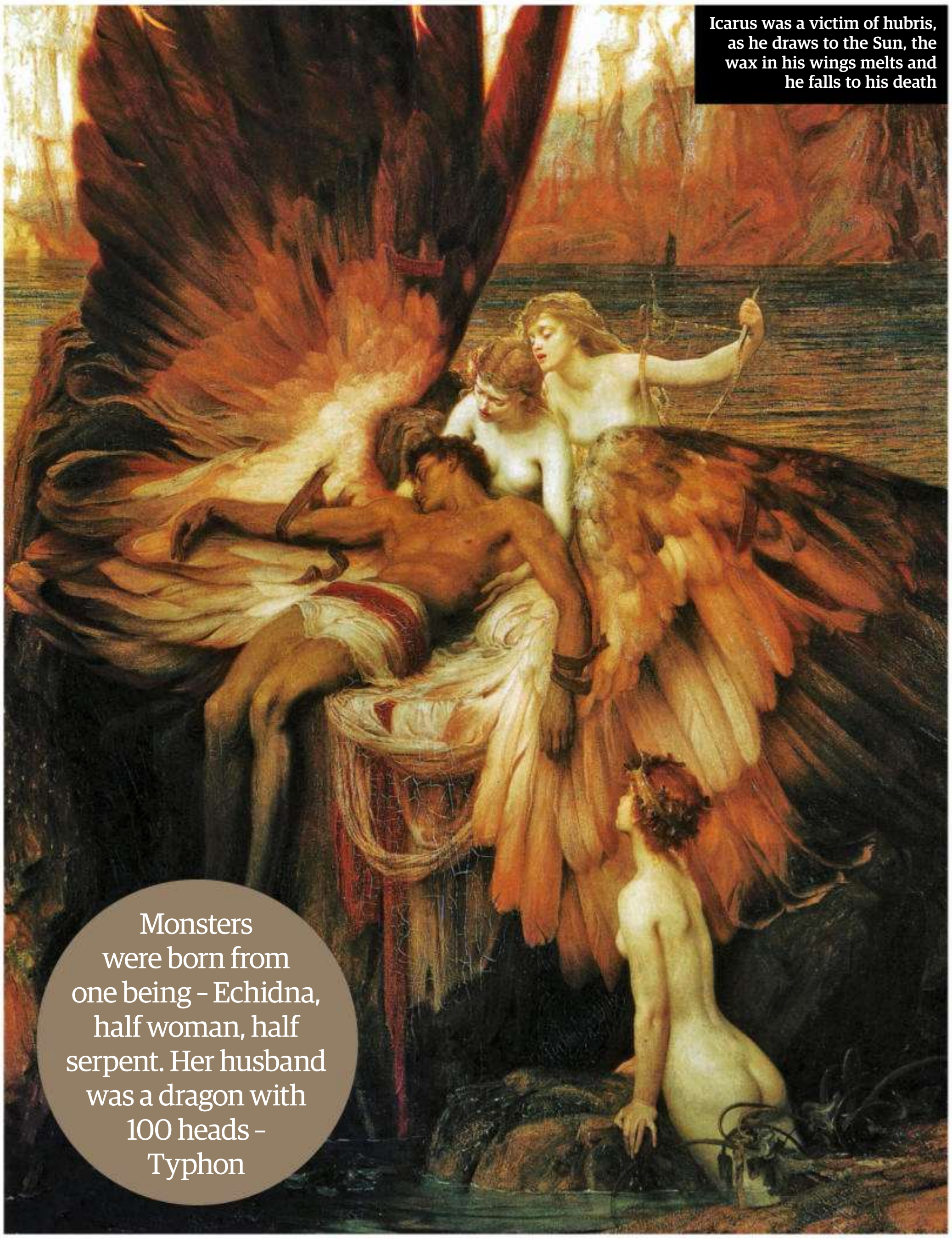
Acrisius, King of Argos, growing frustrated at not having a son, went to the oracle of Delphi for advice. However, she told him that his own grandson was fated to kill him. Terrified of the warning he imprisoned his daughter, Danae, in a room beneath the earth. However, Danae fell pregnant as Zeus pierced through the walls of the chamber in the form of golden rain. Wanting to be rid of his grandson, Acrisius sent the newborn Perseus and Danae out into the open sea. However the two washed ashore Serifos Island.

As Perseus grew up the king of the island, Polydectes began to lust after Danae and, knowing he could not approach her with Perseus protecting her sent him off on a dangerous mission. He challenged him to return with the head of the Gorgon Medusa. Medusa's origin story differs, but most paint her as a beautiful maiden who was punished by Athena and turned into a monster with live snakes for hair, whoever looked upon her was turned to stone. Perseus asked Athena and Hermes for assistance and they gifted him winged sandals, a cap of invisibility and a mirrored shield. Using the mirrored shield, Perseus was able to approach Medusa without looking directly at her. He cut off Medusa's head and completed the task. Perseus would continue to use the head as a weapon, turning Polydectes to stone.

There were actually three Gorgon sisters; Medusa, Stheno and Euryale

nature. For example, the sunset and sunrise is explained as the result of the god Helios riding his chariot across the sky, while earthquakes are the god of the sea, Poseidon, crashing his trident into the ground. There are myths to explain echoes, rainbows, constellations, the passing of the seasons. Even the nature of time itself is woven into myth, Helios has 350 herds of cattle for each day of the year, the moon goddess Selene had 50 daughters to represent the 50 lunar months of the four-year Olympiad cycle - a Greek measurement of time. In this way not only were myths there to provide answers to unknown natural occurrences, but they also became woven and developed as the Greek advanced themselves.

Whether the majority of Greeks thoroughly believed the explanations given in myths is up for debate. We do know that by the 6th century BCE philosophers had become sceptical about the tales, seeking scientific, rational explanations for nature's curiosities. However, this did not slow the popularity of the myths, and this is likely because of the strong resonance the tales had for all of Greek society. Moral lessons form the basis of almost every Greek myth in some capacity and they were not written to entertain, but to serve as lessons and warnings. It is interesting that Greek gods, unlike the gods of most religions were flawed. The heart of the dramas are not tales of the divine but of real people; they fall in love, they get jealous, fight and make mistakes. For example, Hera, the wife of Zeus, is shown as being spiteful and jealous because of her husband's affairs. However, the subject of her hate is not her cheating husband, but the women he cheats on her with. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, bribes Paris to name her the most beautiful goddess by promising him the most beautiful woman in the world as a prize. He does so and she gives him Helen, thus starting the battle of Troy. These and many more similar myths are cautionary tales, advising the listener how to live their lives to avoid grisly fates. The tale of King Midas, who wishes for everything he touches to turn to gold, but then almost starves to death as a result symbolises the evils and dangers of greed. Hubris, the sin of excessive pride and arrogance,



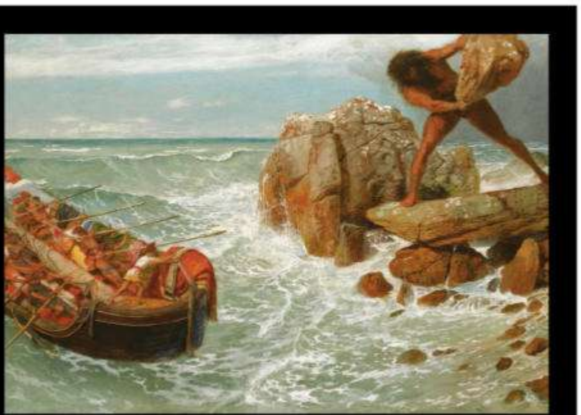
Icarus was a victim of hubris, as he draws to the Sun, the wax in his wings melts and he falls to his death

Monsters were born from one being - Echidna, half woman, half serpent. Her husband was a dragon with 100 heads - Typhon

Odysseus and the Cyclops

After enjoying a victory at Troy, a clever Greek leader, Odysseus, set sail and came upon an island. Growing increasingly hungry, Odysseus led his men towards the sound of bleating goats. They found a large cave full of provisions, filled their bellies and fell asleep. However they were startled awake by a man as big as a barn with one giant eye; the Cyclops Polyphemus leading his large herd of sheep back to the cave. Enraged by the men's theft, the monster seized two of the Greeks, bashed them against rocks and ate their remains. He rolled a huge stone before the mouth of the cave and fell asleep.

When the Cyclops awoke he consumed two more men, then rolled away the stone, led his sheep out then rolled it back. While the monster was gone Odysseus and his men made a sharp stick. When the Cyclops returned, Odysseus offered him strong wine, which he consumed and became drunk. He asked for Odysseus' name to which he responded "Nobody." When the Cyclops fell asleep Odysseus took the stick, heated it in the fire and drove it into Polyphemus's eye. He howled with pain, but the other Cyclops did not help him as he claimed that "Nobody" did it. Blinded, the Cyclops led his sheep out the next morning, unaware that Odysseus and his men were tied to their bellies. It wasn't until Odysseus was in his boat, escaping to the sea that he told the furious Polyphemus his true name.

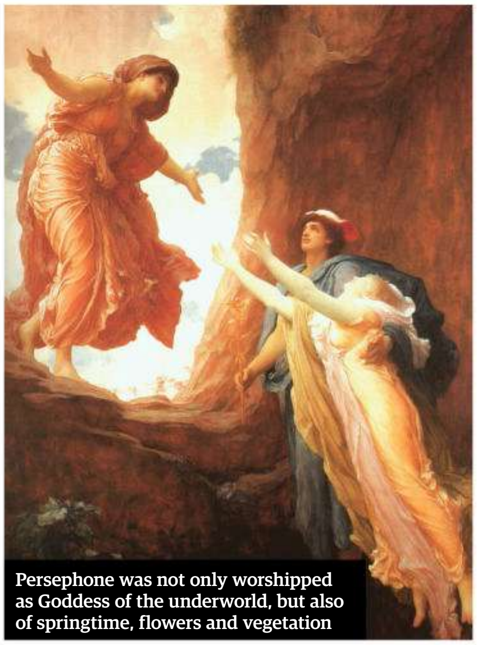


Polyphemus's name means 'abounding in songs and legends'

Hades and Persephone

Hades, god of the underworld and brother of Zeus, stumbled upon Persephone, a goddess and daughter of Demeter, the goddess of harvest and agriculture. He quickly fell in love, but Demeter was very protective of her offspring. Hades instead asked Zeus' permission to abduct her, which he gave. Hades broke through a great cleft in the earth as Persephone was gathering flowers and took her away to the underworld. Demeter, distraught at her daughter's disappearance, searched all over the world, neglecting her role in nature and all ceased to grow. Finally, she discovered where her daughter was taken and Zeus, pressured by the hunger of his people, bid her release.

However, Hades was not too keen to lose his bride. Before he released Persephone he gave her pomegranate seeds to eat, and as she had tasted food of the underworld, she was fated to spend a third of each year there, then return to the world of gods above. These three months that Demeter must face without her beloved daughter became winter, where the land grows cold and nothing will grow.



Persephone was not only worshipped as Goddess of the underworld, but also of springtime, flowers and vegetation

Nymphs are frequently seen in Greek mythology, usually connected with nature

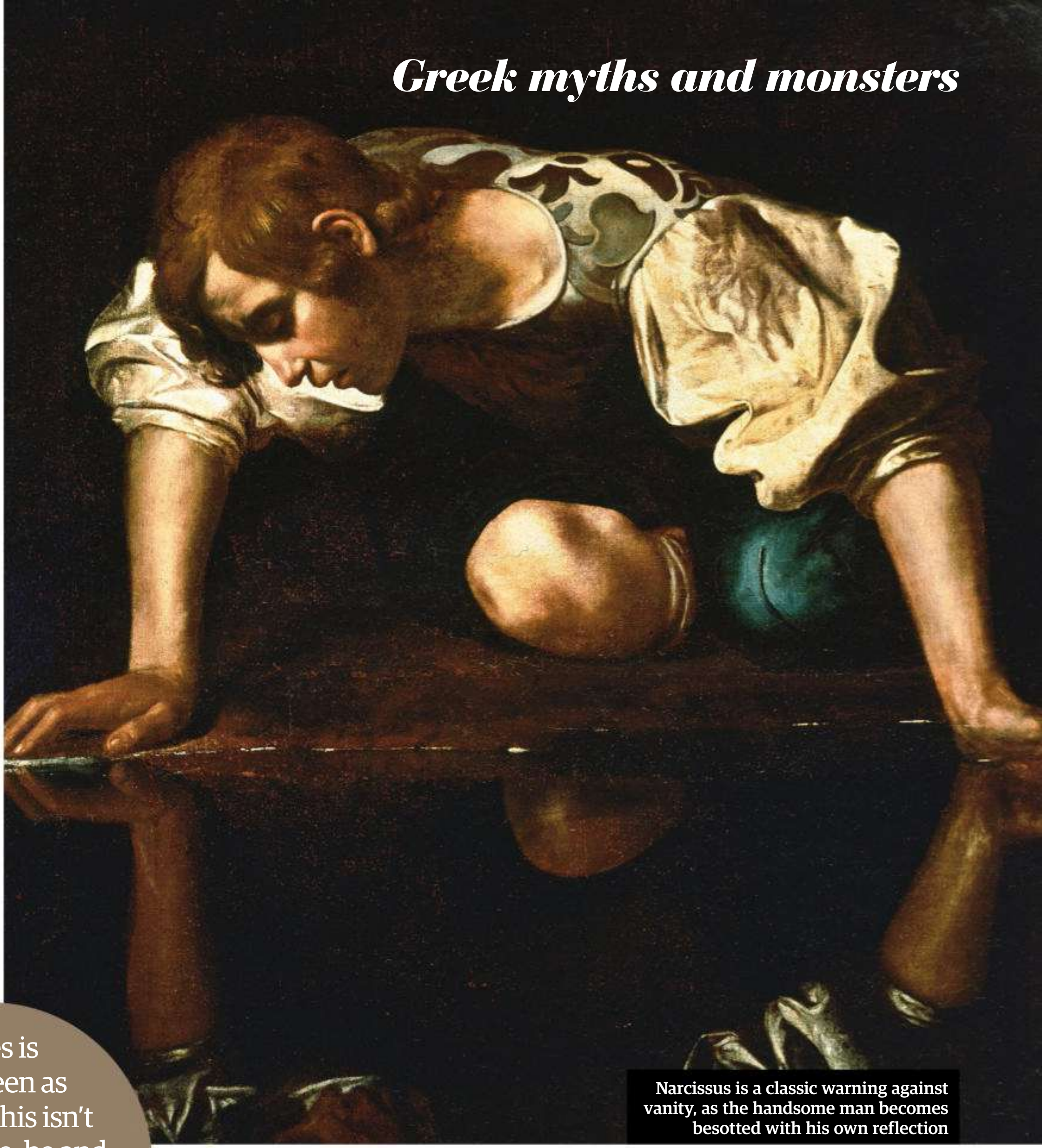
was a crucial moral concept to the Greeks. These cautionary tales warned the population against extremes, and emphasised the importance of moderation. This was the same society that believed that athletics and intellect should both feature equally in their competitions and games, and their myths demonstrate time and time again that anything done to excess will lead a person down the path of ill-fate.

Although modern admirers of Greek myth are typically more fascinated with the tales of gods and goddesses, the contemporary audience's favourites were by far from the age of heroes - where it is mortals who take centre stage, fight epic battles and, against all odds, achieve greatness. Many of these heroes like Hercules and Achilles bridge the gap between god and man as they have divine parents, but mortal flaws. Their fantastic tales of adventure and peril are not simply to entertain, but to portray the boons of certain ideal qualities. The tale of Hercules fighting through 12 dangerous and daring labours is one of strength, but to a larger degree, perseverance. Penelope, the wife of Odysseus displays the trait of fidelity as she dutifully waits for her husband to return from the war, rejecting her suitors until he returns and they live a long and happy life. This story sent a clear message to women particularly about the importance of loyalty to their spouses in a society where women were seen as 'belonging' to a man, and adultery was judged as worse than rape.

In many cases the development and frequency of certain themes in Greek mythology increased alongside Ancient Greek customs. For example, at the same time that it became normal in society for older men to have a younger, male sexual companion, tales of relationships between male gods and male heroes became more prevalent. Eventually almost every major male god had their own adolescent male partner, such as Zeus and Ganymede. Previous myths which had no obvious relation to same sex male relationships were retold in a new light, such as the heroes of the Trojan War, Achilles and Patroclus. While previously their close relationship had been portrayed as 'brothers in arms' by Homer, by the time poets Plato and Aeschylus retold the story, the two were lovers.

Greek society was not only influenced by myth, but myth also reacted to and was transformed by the changes in society, the two were intrinsically linked, and as Greek culture grew and developed, so did the myths.

A classic, repeated feature of Greek mythology are strange, terrifying and bizarre monsters. Odysseus faces a one eyed cyclops in his quest, Hercules must defeat a hydra with multiple heads, there's the Gorgon Medusa who can turn a man to stone with a look and Cerberus, the monstrous beast who guards the gates of hell. These fierce beasts are often more memorable than the heroes themselves, and their terrifying descriptions emphasise the difficulty of the tasks the heroes must overcome, and subsequently, their bravery and cunning in defeating them. Many of these beasts are chaotic mixes of creatures, unnatural and terrifying. A prime example is the Chimera, a fire-breathing monstrosity with the head and body of a lion, head of a goat and a snake's tail, they represent chaos and lack of reason, by defeating them the heroes maintain the natural order of things. This again, has echoes in Greek society, where law and order was valued highly with the creation of the Draconian constitution, and those who upset the order of society, or went against it were treated harshly, with the punishment of either exile or death.



Narcissus is a classic warning against vanity, as the handsome man becomes besotted with his own reflection

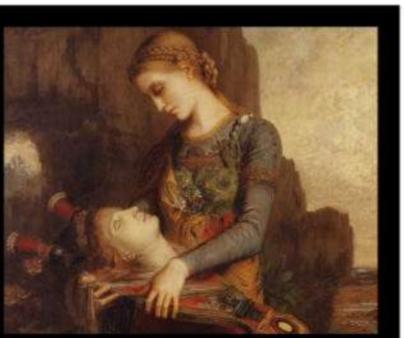
Hades is often seen as 'evil' but this isn't strictly true, he and Zeus are brothers, and drew lots to rule the lower and upper worlds

Another explanation for the presence of these terrible creatures is that they represented the unknown world beyond Ancient Greek knowledge. The unfamiliar, and perhaps alarming, experiences that travelling Greeks experienced could explain some of the bizarre but somewhat recognisable features of myths. The huge, sprawling palace of King Minos in Crete may have come across to a visiting Greek as a labyrinth. Bull-leaping and the worship of bulls in general was also rampant in Crete, which could explain the bull-like Minotaur that was encased within the maze in the myth. It seems more than a coincidence that in the tale the person who is charged with fighting this beast is a visiting Athenian. Frequently these creatures lay on distant lands, like the Sirens who reside on small islands, beckoning sailors to their doom. It would make sense that a society who was just exploring the vast world outside, would view it as one filled with danger and strange sights, and this was portrayed through myths.

Whether the Greek people regarded it as fact, legend or simply stories, Greek myth permeated every part of Greek life. Not only did it inspire art, sculpture and poetry, but it also served as important life lessons and warnings for the people of Ancient Greece. Society and myth were intrinsically intertwined as when one was developed it inevitably affected the other. In this way, whether based on true events or not, Greek mythology can tell us much about the culture that created it, the questions the people had, their view of the world, their values and the development of their own society.

Orpheus and Eurydice

Orpheus was the son of the god Apollo and the muse Calliope and was gifted with immense musical talent. It was said that his lyre playing and singing was so beautiful it could enchant inanimate objects. It was this music that had attracted the wood nymph, Eurydice, to him. It was love at first sight and they were soon married. However, as they departed the wedding celebrations a jealous shepherd, Aristaeus jumped on them from a bush, desiring to claim Eurydice for his own. The lovers ran, but Eurydice stumbled and fell. It was not Aristaeus who had caught her, but instead she had stepped into a snake's nest and was bitten by a viper. Eurydice died and Orpheus was overcome with grief and travelled to the underworld to get her back. Persuading Hades with his music, the god promised Orpheus his wife would follow him to the world above, as long as he did not look back at her while she was in the dark. Orpheus journeyed through the underworld, resisting the urge to look back until finally he took a step into the sun and turned around. However, Eurydice was still in the dark, and she was drawn back into the world of the dead. The heart-broken musician was unable to produce any more music, and he shunned the company of women. One group of scorned women seized him, killed him, then cut his body up and threw all of the pieces into a river. Finally, Orpheus' spirit was free to reunite with his beloved in the underworld.



Orpheus' head and lyre travelled together downstream, still playing beautiful music

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Secrets of the Oracle

The oracles of Delphi have been shrouded in mystery for millennia, but now scientists believe they have an explanation

Ancient Greece was a world dominated by men. Men filled the highest positions in society, men fought on the battlefield and men ruled the mightiest empires. However, all these men, from the lowliest peasant to the emperor himself, sought the council and advice of one person – and that person was a woman.

The city of Delphi had long traditions of being the centre of the world; it was said that Zeus himself named it the navel of Gaia. According to legend, a huge serpent, named Python, guarded the spot before it was slain by the infant god Apollo. When Apollo's arrows pierced the serpent, its body fell into a fissure and great fumes arose from the crevice as its carcass rotted. All those who stood over the gaping fissure fell into sudden, often violent, trances. In this state, it was believed that Apollo would possess the person and fill them with divine presence.

These peculiar occurrences attracted Apollo-worshipping settlers during the Mycenaean era, and slowly but surely the primitive sanctuary grew into a shrine, and then, by 7th century BCE, a temple. It would come to house a single person, chosen to serve as the bridge between this world and the next. Named after the great serpent, this chosen seer was named the Pythia – the oracle.

Communication with a god was no small matter, and not just anyone could be allowed or trusted to serve this venerated position. It was decided that a pure, chaste and honest young virgin would be the most appropriate vessel for such a divine role. However, there was one drawback – beautiful young virgins were prone to attracting negative attention from the men who sought their council, which resulted in oracles being raped and violated. Older women of at least 50 began to fill the position, and as a reminder of what used to be, they would dress in the virginal garments of old.

GREECE
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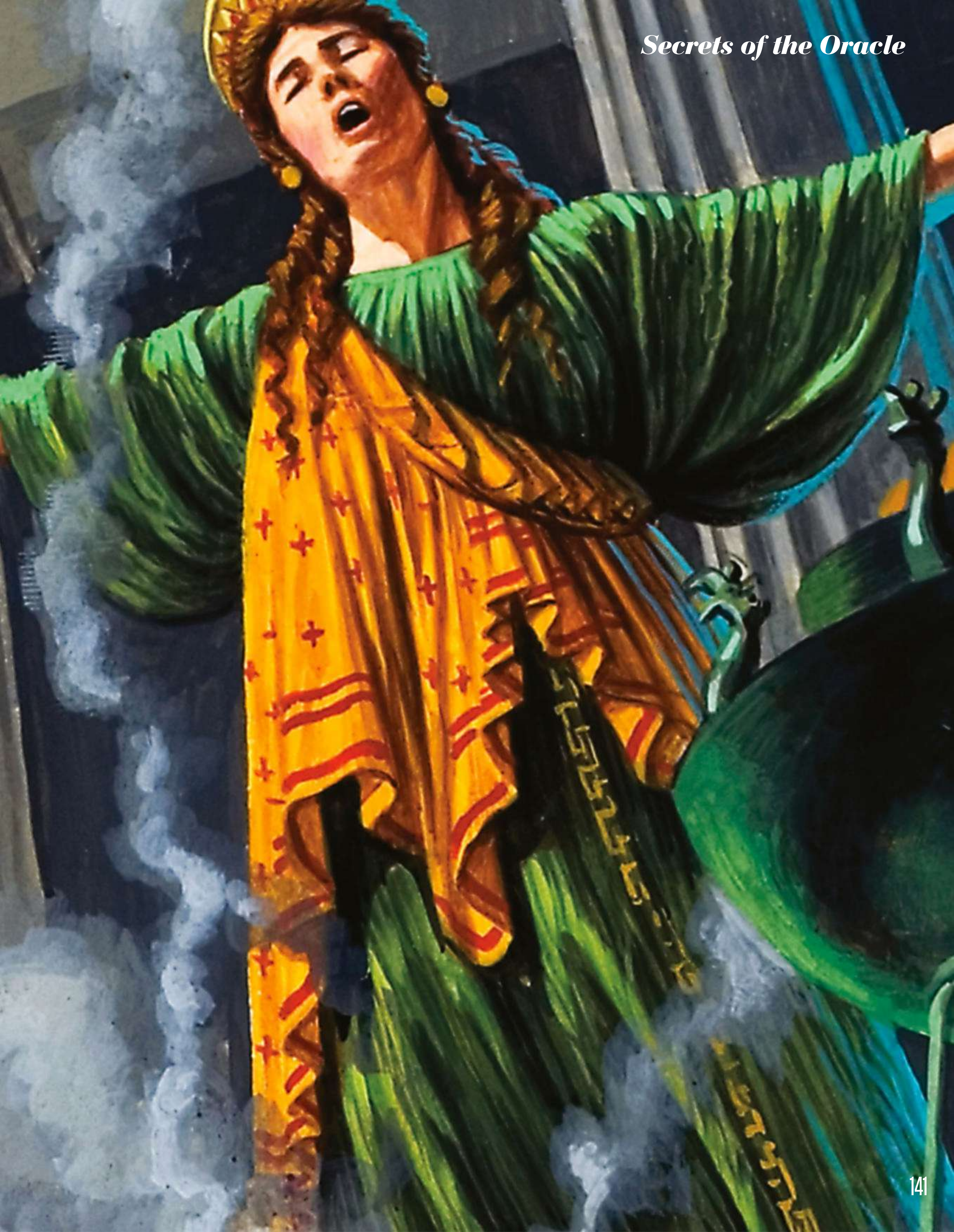
These older women were often chosen from the priestesses of Delphi temple, but could also be any respected native of Delphi. Educated noblewomen were prized, but even peasants could fill the position. Those Pythia who were previously married were required to relinquish all family responsibility and even their individual identities. To be an oracle was to take up an ancient and vitally important role – one that transcended the self, and entered into legend. Pythia were so important so it was essential that they were a blank slate – children, husbands and any links to previous life had to be severed in favour of Apollo and divinity.

The reason for the growing importance of the oracles was simple – the Pythia provided answers. For an ambitious and religious civilisation, this very visual and vocal link to the gods was treated with the utmost respect. For the nine warmest months of each year, on the seventh day of each month the Pythia would accept questions from all members of Greek society. This was to correspond with the belief that Apollo deserted the temple during the winter months.

After being 'purified' by fasting, drinking holy water and bathing in the sacred Castalian Spring, the Pythia would assume her position



Ask the Oracle

If you have a problem or simply wish to know what the future holds – the oracle has the answer

I'm a Spartan lawmaker and recently outside influence has been threatening our proud nation. Are these other countries a bad influence or am I being an old stick in the mud?

Lycurgus, Sparta

Love of money and nothing else will ruin Sparta.

I know it's silly but I'm absolutely obsessed with my own death! Do you have any idea what I can do to prevent my early demise?

Lysander, Sparta

Beware the serpent, earthborn, in craftiness coming behind thee.

I've recently captured my own island. I have to come up with some laws but I'm not sure what sort of ruler I should be. Any advice?

Solon, Athens

Seat yourself now amid ships, for you are the pilot of Athens. Grasp the helm fast in your hands; you have many allies in your city.

An old foe has reared his ugly head and wants to face my soldiers in battle. The only problem is that we are vastly outnumbered. Should I face him?

Leonidas, Sparta

The strength of bulls or lions cannot stop the foe. No, he will not leave off, until he tears the city or the king limb from limb.

Although I'm already a king, I feel unfulfilled with my life. I want to do something really impressive. What should I do to make my name?

Philip, Macedon

With silver spears you may conquer the world.

My friend is a really important person, but he's been making some really questionable decisions lately. Should I stick by him?

Cicero, Arpino

Make your own nature, not the advice of others, your guide in this life.

My enemy will not leave me alone! I know I can't fight him, but is there a way I can at least defend myself from his attacks?

Themistocles, Athens

A wall of wood alone shall be uncaptured, a boon to you and your children.

My friend, Socrates, is such a know-it-all. He literally has an answer for everything. Please settle a dispute for us: is there anyone who is smarter than him?

Chaerephon, Athens

No human is wiser.

My dad was a very famous soldier and everyone expects me to follow in his footsteps. Now war has broken out, I feel pressured to join the army. But I am not sure. Should I sign up?

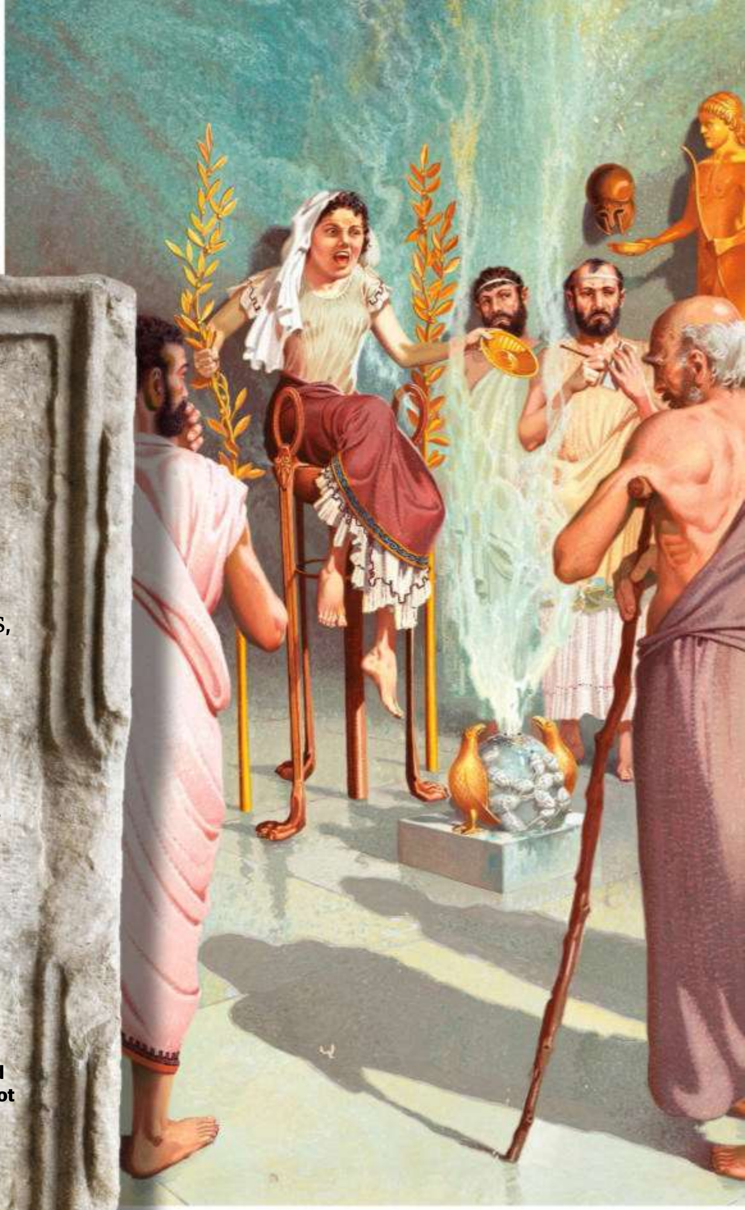
Gaios, Delphi

You will go, return not die in the war.

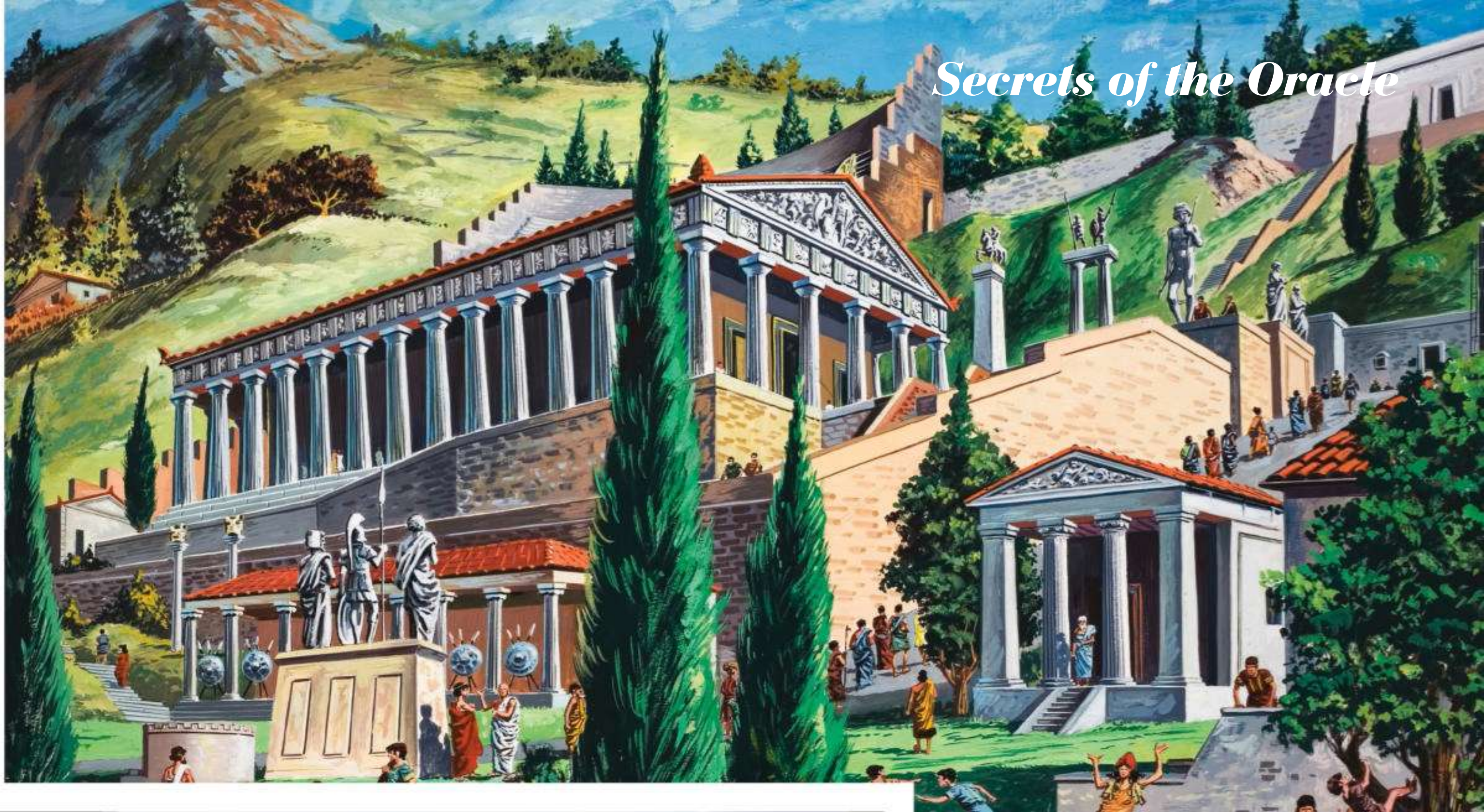
I've sacrificed everything, even family members, for power. But it's still not enough. What can I do to satisfy my greed?

Nero, Antium

Your presence here outrages the god that you seek. Go back, matricide! The number 73 marks the hour of your downfall!

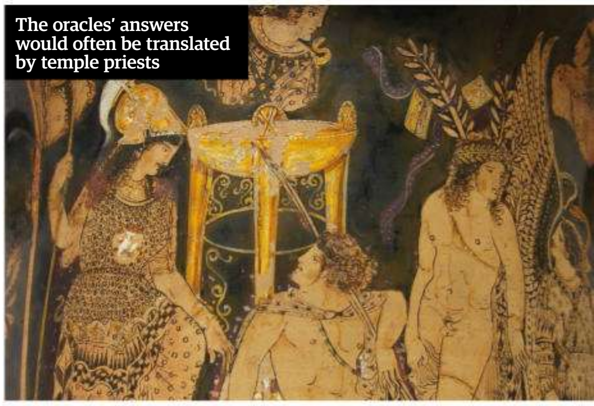


The first oracles were young virgins. They were later replaced with women aged over 50



The site of Delphi was one of the most sacred in Ancient Greece

The oracles' answers would often be translated by temple priests



upon a tripod seat, clasping laurel reeds in one hand and a dish of spring water in the other. Positioned above the gaping fissure, the vapours of the ancient vanquished serpent would wash over her and she would enter the realm of the divine.

People flocked from far and wide to speak to the woman who could communicate with the gods. Known as consultants, many of those who wished to ask the oracle a question would travel for days or even weeks to reach Delphi. Once they arrived they underwent an intense grilling from the priests, who would determine the genuine cases and instruct them the correct way to frame their questions. Those who were approved then had to undergo a variety of traditions, such as carrying laurel wreaths to the temple. It was also encouraged for consultants to provide a monetary donation as well as an animal to be sacrificed. Once the animal had been sacrificed, its guts would be studied. If the signs were seen as unfavourable, the consultant could be sent home. Finally, the consultant was allowed to approach the Pythia and ask his question. In some accounts, it seems the oracles gave the answers, but others report the Pythia would utter incomprehensible words that the priests would 'translate' into verse. Once he received his answer, the consultant would journey home to act upon the advice of the oracle.

This was the tricky part. The oracle received a multitude of visitors in the nine days she was available, from farmers desperate to know the outcome of the harvest to emperors asking if they should wage war on their enemies, and her answers were not always clear. Responses, or their translations by the temple priests, often seemed deliberately phrased so that, no matter the outcome, the oracle would always be right. It was essential for the consultant to carefully consider her words, or else risk a bad harvest, or even the defeat of an entire army. When Croesus, the king of Lydia, asked the oracle if he should attack Persia, he received the response: "If you cross the river, a great empire will be destroyed." He viewed this as a good omen and went ahead with the invasion. Unfortunately, the great empire that was destroyed was his own. In this way, the oracle, just like the gods, was infallible, and her divine reputation grew. To question the oracle was to question the gods – and that was unthinkable.

Soon, no major decision was made before consulting the oracle of Delphi. It wasn't just Greek people, but also foreign dignitaries, leaders and kings who travelled to Delphi for a chance to ask the oracle a question. Those who could afford it would pay great sums of money for a fast pass through the long lines of pilgrims and commoners. Using these donations, the temple grew in size and prominence. Quickly, Delphi seemed to be fulfilling its own prophecy of being the centre of the world, and attracted visitors for the Pythian Games, a precursor of the Olympic Games. On the influence of the oracle's statements, Delphi became a powerful and prosperous city-state. The oracle sat at the centre of not just the city of Delphi, but the great Greek empire itself. No important decision was made without her consultation, and so, for nearly a thousand years, the position of perhaps the greatest political and social influence in the ancient world was occupied by a woman.

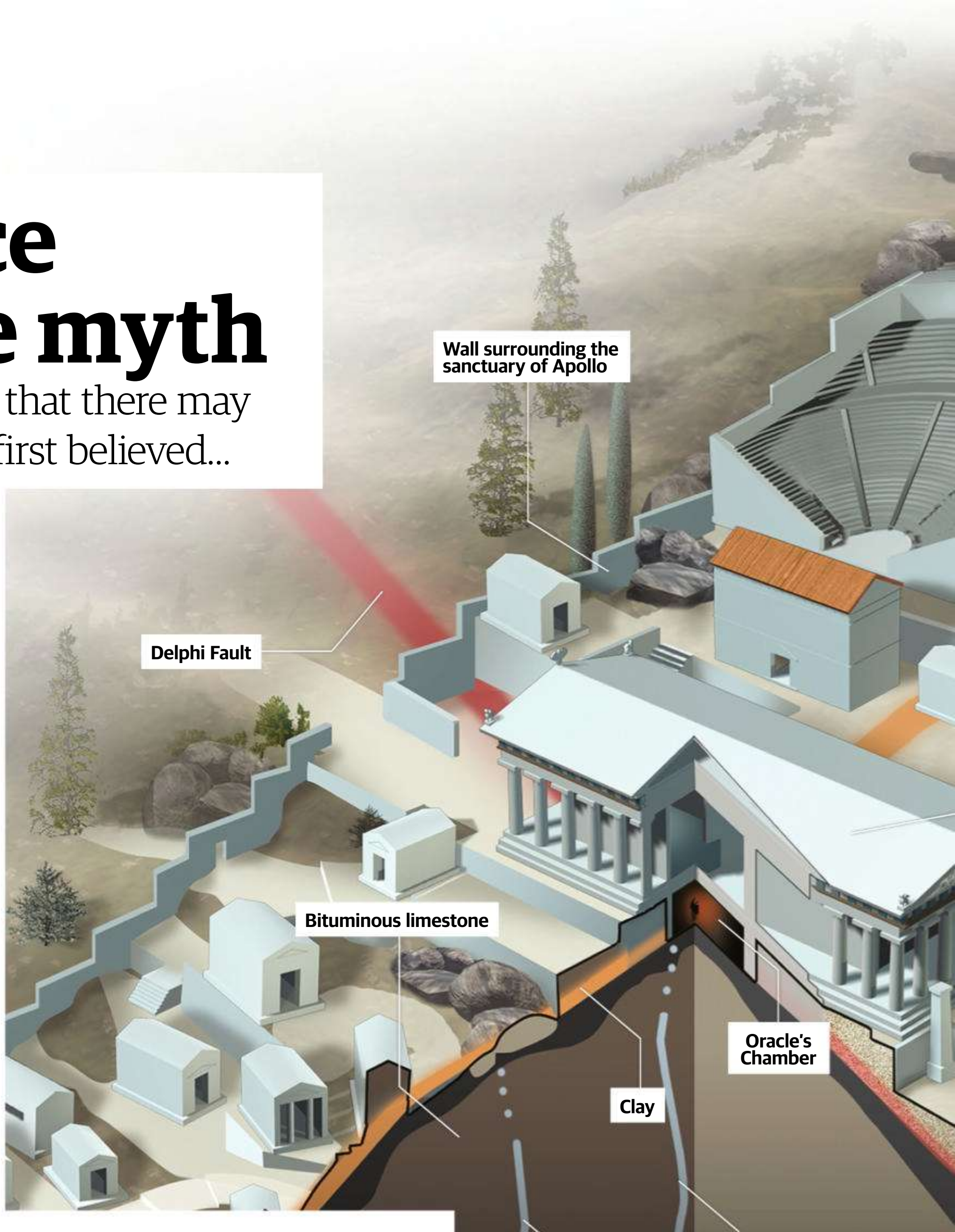
The science behind the myth

Excavations have revealed that there may be more to the story than first believed...

Ever since the emergence of science in society, a scientific explanation for the Pythia's visionary trances has been sought. One of the most valuable accounts of the oracle's trances comes from Plutarch, who served as a priest at the temple in Delphi. He described how sweet-smelling gases arising from the fissure would cause the priestesses to fall into a strange trance. It seemed there was some truth to Plutarch's account, as when archaeologists studied the temple ruins they discovered a few peculiar features.

The inner sanctum where the Pythia sat, for example, was two to four metres below the level of the surrounding floor, and there was also a nearby drain for spring water. This structure was unique when compared to any other Ancient Greek temple. All of this proved one thing - that there was definitely something strange going on in the temple of Apollo.

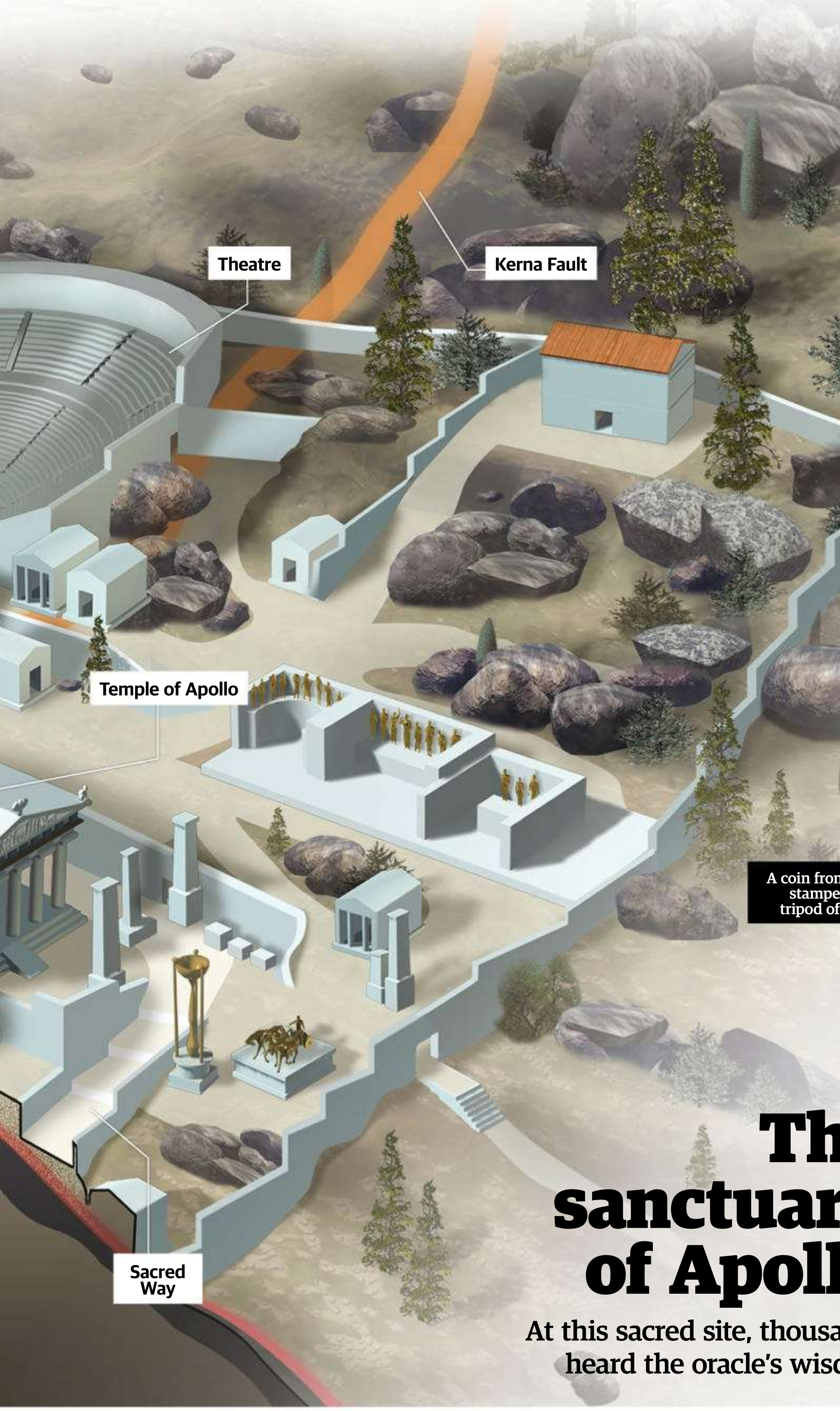
Curious about the existence of the fissure mentioned in Plutarch's accounts, in 1892, French archaeologists set about excavating the ruins of the temple with the goal of discovering an ancient cave or hole in the ground. However, surprisingly, nothing of the sort was found. By 1904, it was declared that Plutarch's temple fumes were simply an ancient myth, and never really existed. In 1948, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* read that: "Excavation has rendered improbable the



The remains of the temple of Apollo as it stands today

Alternative theories

The oracles claimed their trances came from Apollo, scientists blame gases, but these aren't the only explanations for the peculiar incidents



The sanctuary of Apollo

At this sacred site, thousands heard the oracle's wisdom

Snake venom

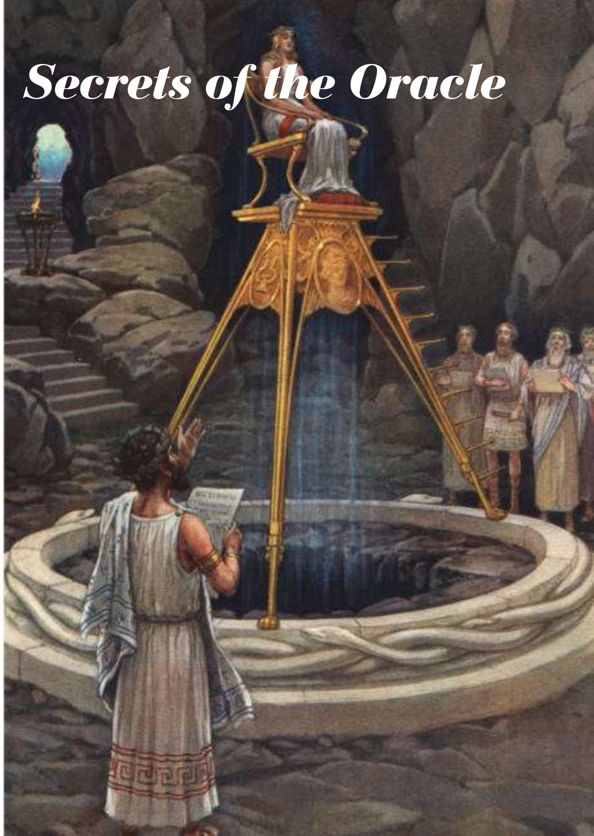
It is possible that the trances were brought on by snake venom, particularly that of the cobra or krait snake. After becoming immunised against the venom, a bite from a snake can produce hallucinogenic symptoms that affect the person's emotional and mental state.

Laurel leaves

Laurel leaves were always carried by the oracles, and they were also reported to chew on them because of their link with Apollo. It has been hypothesised that it was the leaves that brought on the oracle's trances, but as they are not hallucinogenic, this is unlikely.

Political puppets

One of the most popular theories explaining the state of the oracles is that they were simply faking their trances. Because of the power that their prophecies could hold, it's theorised that the priests or the women themselves manipulated this power as they saw fit.



Worship of the oracle came to an end in 390 CE

A coin from 480 BCE stamped with the tripod of the oracle

post-classical theory of a chasm with mephitic vapours."

That was believed to be true until the late 1980s, when a new team of curious scientists decided to investigate the ruins for themselves. The rocks they discovered beneath the temple were oily bituminous limestone and were fractured by two faults that crossed beneath the temple. This had to be more than a coincidence. The scientists theorised that tectonic movements and ancient earthquakes caused friction along the faults. Combined with the spring water that ran beneath the temple, methane, ethylene and ethane gas would rise through the faults to the centre and directly into the temple. The low room with its limited ventilation and lack of oxygen would help amplify the effect of the gases and induce the trance-like symptoms experienced by the oracles.

It was the ethylene gas especially that drew a lot of interest. Ethylene is a sweet-smelling gas, just like Plutarch had reported, and in small doses is said to have the ability to cause trances and frenzied states. Tests conducted with ethylene reported that a dosage higher than 20 per cent could cause unconsciousness; however, less than that and the patient was able to sit up and answer questions, though their voice was altered. There were also instances of fits, thrashing, loss of memory and altered speech patterns, all of which correspond with Plutarch's accounts of the oracles. However, as is always the case with speculative science, this theory is not universally agreed upon, and other scientists argue that other gases such as carbon dioxide and methane are responsible for the hallucinogenic states. Either way, it seems the answer to the question of the mysterious Delphi oracles lies in the peculiar structure of the temple and unique geography of the site, which all aligned to produce something truly remarkable.

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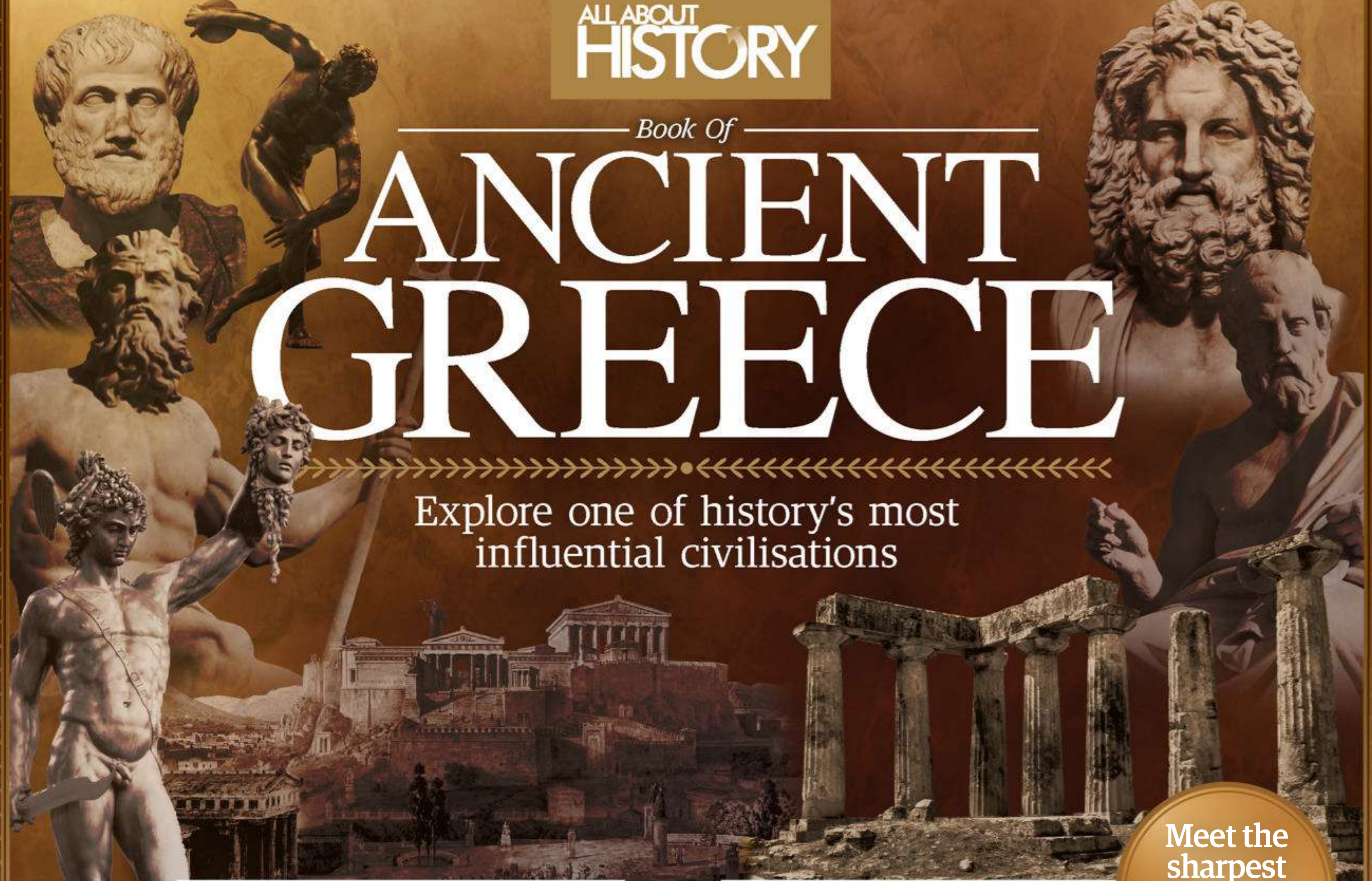

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